

JOHNSTOWN IN 1881

# “Hell And High Water”



## SAGA OF THE SECOND JOHNSTOWN FLOOD



A Pictorial Resume Of The St.  
Patrick's Day Disaster,  
March 17, 1936

By:  
Wm. H. RODGERS  
PENN G. DIVELY













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# ***“Hell and High Water”***

## **The Saga Of The Second Johnstown Flood**

BY  
**WILLIAM H. RODGERS**  
AND  
**PENN G. DIVELY**

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SOMERSET, PENNSYLVANIA.





# Personal Log And Autographs

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# NOTES

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# Dedication

**T**O the suffering thousands, whose losses are incalculable and whose lives will be affected for months to come . . .

**T**O those families upon whose shoulders fell the burden of added sorrow when friends or relatives were swept away . . .

**T**O the thousands of nameless men and women who toiled without thought of gain, without consciousness of station or creed . . .

**T**O valiant Guardsmen, Militiamen, civil authorities, nurses, WPA workers, CCC men, the Red Cross, relief agencies, volunteers, Boy Scouts, firemen, lodges, organizations, highway patrolmen, policemen—and in brief . . .

**T**O helpful citizens in neighboring boroughs, towns, counties and states—To Johnstown itself and all that it represents . . .

**W**E sincerely dedicate this book.

THE EDITORS



# Forward

**I**N this book we have attempted to give a brief but accurate account of Johnstown's second major disaster since the founding of the city.

**T**HE St. Patrick's Day flood of 1936 was a terrible catastrophe, spreading horror and havoc among a populace already overburdened with financial losses and economic setbacks over a period of several years.

**T**HE fact that the city started to rebuild, less than 100 hours after being reduced to partial ruin, is a testimonial and an immortal tribute to the type of courage and resourcefulness that is embodied in the average American.

**T**HE editors, being in sympathy with the wrecked city, salute the community and its people in the midst of what, at this early April day of publication, seems to be a hopeless task.

**T**HIS book was hastily compiled for commercial reasons, but because of that, it is none the less sincere. We hope that this small publication will stand as a record—both from a pictorial and an informative point of view—of the disaster. However, if some other booklet takes its place in the official realm, we feel that we have done our best, under the circumstances, in producing a thing of permanent value.

**A** GAIN, we salute a stricken city!

WILLIAM H. RODGERS  
PENN G. DIVELY

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## INTRODUCTION AND INDEX OF PICTURES

Better individual photographs of the Johnstown Flood of 1936 undoubtedly exist and are owned by dozens of people who were in a position to take them as waters rose and fell.

While not contending that the pictures in this book are the best, the editors believe they have gathered together one of the most representative collections of flood pictures.

Neither money, time nor resources were spared in collecting the set of photos herein printed. Many of them are copyrighted and it was necessary, to make this book possible, to buy printing and engraving rights.

Each person from whom pictures were purchased was informed that the editors had no desire to sell the print itself; but rather to possess only the rights to engrave and print the photos as a commercial and service enterprise.

Each plate is numbered.

Picture No. 1 is the large two-page photo in the center of the book. The others are numbered and are kept in reasonable order throughout the book.

\* \* \*

### GUIDE FOR PICTURE STUDY

Cover picture—An artist's conception of Johnstown in 1881, eight years before the Johnstown Flood of 1889, which sent 2,300 persons to their graves.

One—"By The Dawn's Early Light," a remarkable photograph taken early Wednesday morning, March 18, from the roof of the Johnstown Trust building, by Rhuel Roberts of Rogers' studio. The photographer, trapped in the building, had nothing to do but snap pictures. So he did, got them copyrighted, and sold engraving rights to editors of this publication.

Two—Daniel J. Shields. Cut loaned by The Johnstown Tribune.

Three—Four scenes of the 1889 flood, reproduced from an old book of lithographs.

Four—A copyrighted Rogers' studio photograph, looking toward Frankstown road from the Trust building. Taken at 6:45 a. m. Wednesday, March 18.

Five—Looking through debris at the corner of Dibert and Napoleon streets, showing the Brethren church.

Six—This aging lady, pleasant and lovely, is rescued with her family and a pet bull terrier from a Franklin street dwelling in the South Side.

Seven—With a luxurious, though powerless Packard in the foreground, only a rowboat is serviceable for transportation at the Brethren church corner in Kernville.

Eight—Looking toward the Curve rounding Franklin street at the Grace Pentecostal church, between Haynes street and the inbound part of Somerset street.

Nine—The steel span linking Kernville with the downtown area comes to rest on the bottom of the river.

Ten—Taken early Wednesday morning, just a few minutes before the Franklin street bridge was forced from its moorings by tons of debris. A Rhuel Roberts, Rogers' studio copyrighted photo.

Eleven—This photograph was snapped by Louis McCready from his office in the Tribune building. It shows Central park and Park place, looking toward Main.

Twelve—The entire South Side is shown under water in an unusual picture copyrighted by the Rogers' studio.

Thirteen—With the post office under water, messages coming into and going out of the flood stricken area were buried beneath tons of silt. Every piece of mail was eventually salvaged and delivered. Note high water mark near windows on post office. Photo by Louis McCready of the Johnstown Tribune.

Fourteen—Looking toward Glosser Brothers' store and Central park. This picture shows the water at its daylight height. A few minutes after this photo was snapped darkness fell, prohibiting further pictures until dawn. Copyrighted photo taken by Rogers' studio at twilight on Tuesday evening.



Wednesday.

Fifteen—This photograph, graciously loaned for this publication by the Works Progress Administration from its collection to be used in government records, shows what people along Willow street, between Somerset and Franklin, had to contend with. People in and near the wrecked dwellings shown here were rescued before waters swept them away.

Sixteen and Seventeen—Two exclusive photos copyrighted, distributed by Central Press to The Somerset Daily Herald, and loaned for this publication. Frantic hundreds are shown scrambling to higher land when the terrifying cry, "The dam has broken," was erroneously sounded.

Eighteen—Boats take marooned victims from imperiled homes as waters recede at noon Wednesday.

Nineteen and Twenty—Pictures obtained through the courtesy of Saul Spiegel of WPA Area No. 11. First shows WPA men cleaning up debris at the end of Market street, near Johns and Carr street. Soldiers break ranks after a day of guarding against looting, as shown in No. 20.

Twenty-one and Twenty-two—Debris piled ten feet high on Napoleon street, shown in a photo by Miss Henrietta Uhl of Somerset, whose photographic equipment made many of these pictures possible. In No. 22 the stately United States bank building is seen towering over wrecked homes which impoverished dozens in the area enclosed in a single photograph.

Twenty-three and Twenty-four—WPA men use the show window of the Penn Furniture Co., for a dining room at lunch time. In No. 24, expensive equipment is shown being brought into play in a search among debris for possible victims.

Twenty-five—No more rides in this family car. It was a total wreck, found a block away from its parking place on Napoleon street.

Twenty-six—A long view of Main street as an army of WPA workers swept into the city to begin the restoration task.

Twenty-seven—Louis McCready took a picture of the military heads of Johnstown during the martial law period. One Johnstown man—Robert Walker of Moxham—was absent when the photo was snapped.

Twenty-eight—The operator of a powerful bull dozer scrapes three and four feet of mud from street sidings near the Joseph Johns school.

Twenty-nine—Park place corner at Main, showing wreckage in front of business houses and giving some indication of the job to be accomplished before the resumption of trade.

Thirty—Courage displayed and a keynote sounded in a bill board, in front of which relief laborers toil away.

Thirty-one—Frank Jordan of The Johnstown Democrat had an eye for human interest and snapped this enterprising animal spreading optimism in the downtown section.

## PICTURE AND ENGRAVING PRIVILEGES

Editors of "Hell and High Water" do not own the right to sell or make photographic prints of pictures in this book. They can be obtained from persons whose names appear under the pictures with the exception of those loaned by the Works Progress Administration.

Copies of any or all pictures appearing in the book can be supplied in the form of printed engravings only. Only the engraving rights—not the photographic print rights—were bought with the photographs.

Engraved prints will be supplied on order by mail to either of the editors at The Somerset Daily Herald office in Somerset, Pa.



“ . . . Honor To Them All”



**MAYOR SHIELDS**

**MAYOR**

Daniel J. Shields

**CITY COUNCIL**

Fred Brosius

Daniel R. Schnabel

Fulton I. Connor

George Griffith

**COUNTY CORONER**

Cyrus W. Davis

**WPA REPRESENTATIVES**

J. Banks Hudson

E. Arthur James

**RED CROSS AND WELFARE  
HEADS**

Robert E. Bondy

Albert Evans

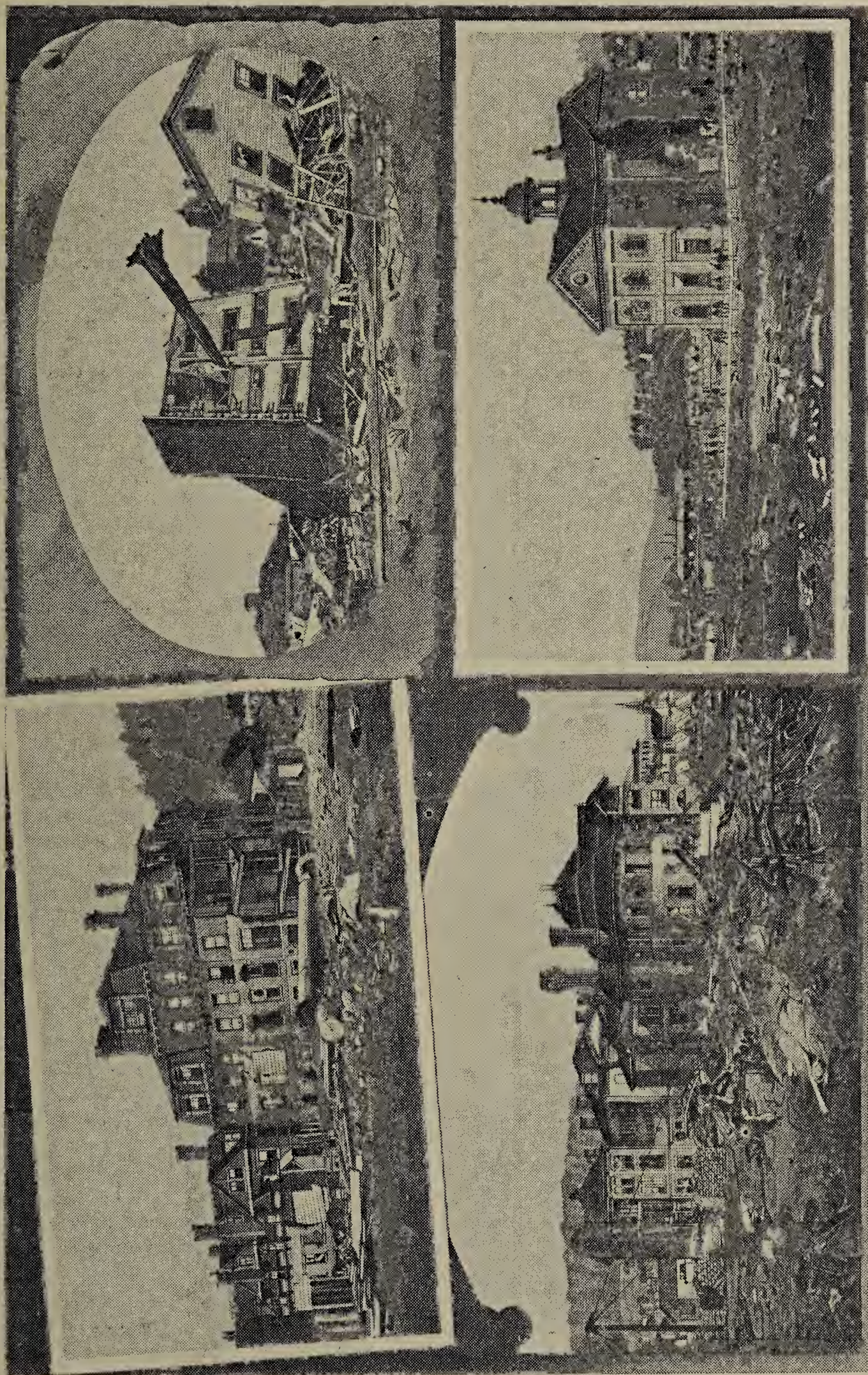
Joseph Anderson

Evan B. Lloyd

AND A THOUSAND OTHERS WHOSE WORK WAS JUST AS  
IMPORTANT ALTHOUGH FURTHER REMOVED FROM PUBLIC LIGHT



Scenes From the Great Flood Of 1889, Taken From a Rare Old Volume of  
Artistically Made Lithographs.

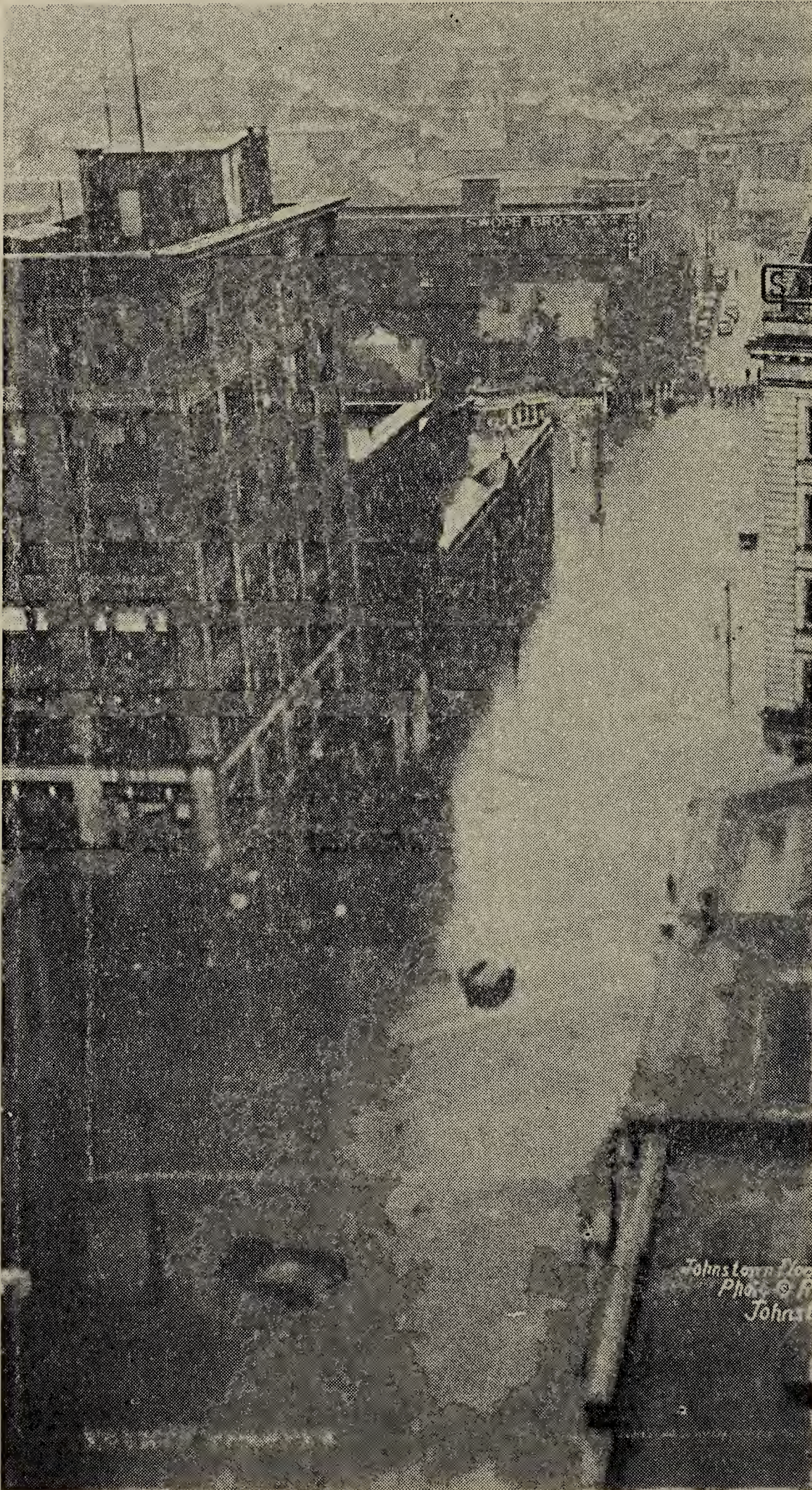


Upper Left—Cambria Iron Company Clubhouse. Upper Right—A Tree Pierces The Home of John Schutt. Lower Left—Company Store and Office. This building withstood both floods and stands today at the Washington Street End of the Iron Street Bridge. Lower Right—Baltimore and Ohio Depot on Washington Street.



## “ . . . The Title Trust Co. is Liquidated Again ”

50 YEARS AGO



A sure-footed young man, lissome and unafraid, caught the signal. He tore at the reins of his impatient horse and sped away through the murky gray light.

Presently he came upon a cluster of houses as a screaming locomotive passed him. He shouted wildly:

“To the hills! The dam has broken!—” And he sped on again to the next house.

All save the 2,300 who were swept into death were grateful . . . But that was half a century ago.

### ST. PATRICK'S DAY 1936

Rain fell steadily over the great watersheds of the Conemaugh and Stonycreek river valleys at intervals for four days as inhabitants of the famous city of Johnstown—famous for a disaster and famous for its friendliness—looked for the usual swelling of rivers with the advent of spring.

It was St. Patrick's day—the fourth day since rain began to fall—and waters had risen to a height regarded as no more than normal, considering a record-breaking snow fall and the melting downpour.

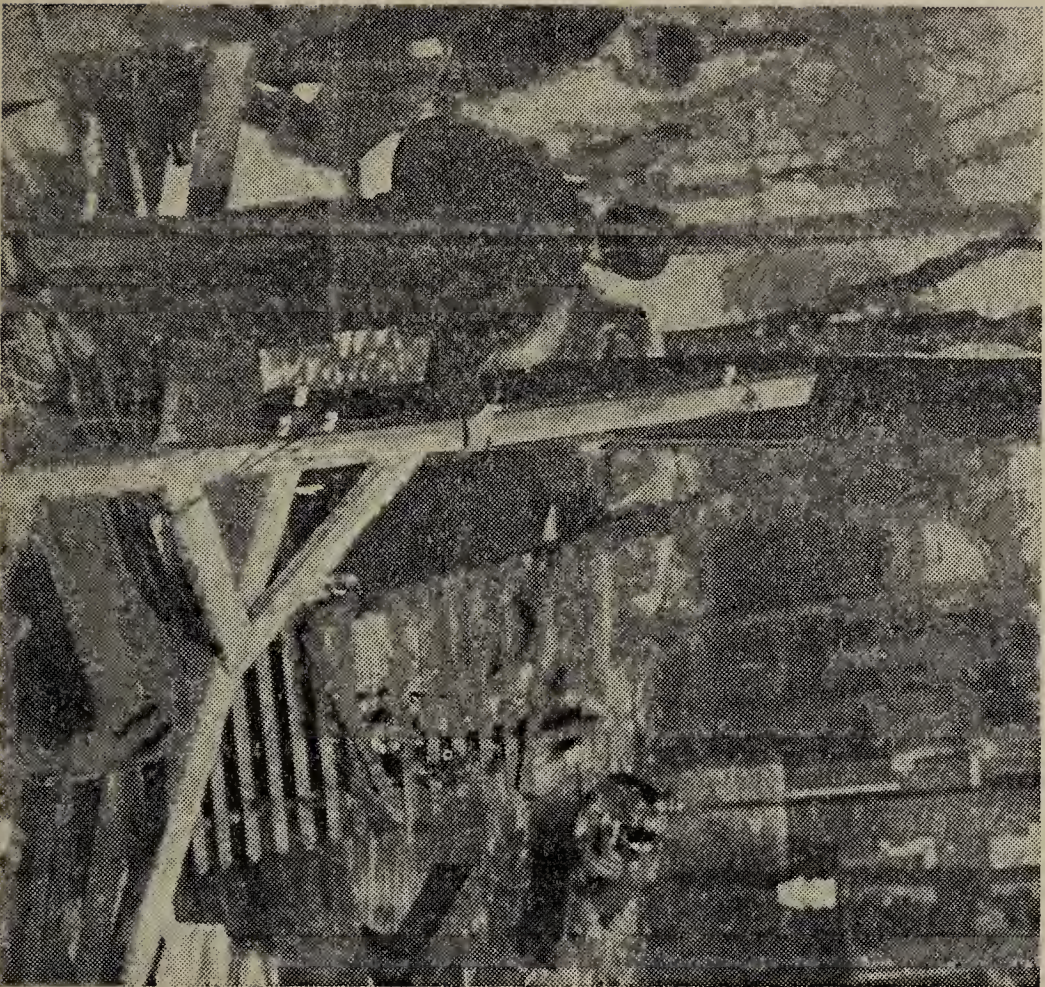
People began to look anxiously out of office windows and department store fronts before noon as rivulets swirled in the streets and rivers rose with

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(4) Photo by Rogers' Studio  
Johnstown Trust Bldg.



**Refugees Watch Rescue Work From Debris**



(5) Photo by Miss Henrietta Uhl, Somerset

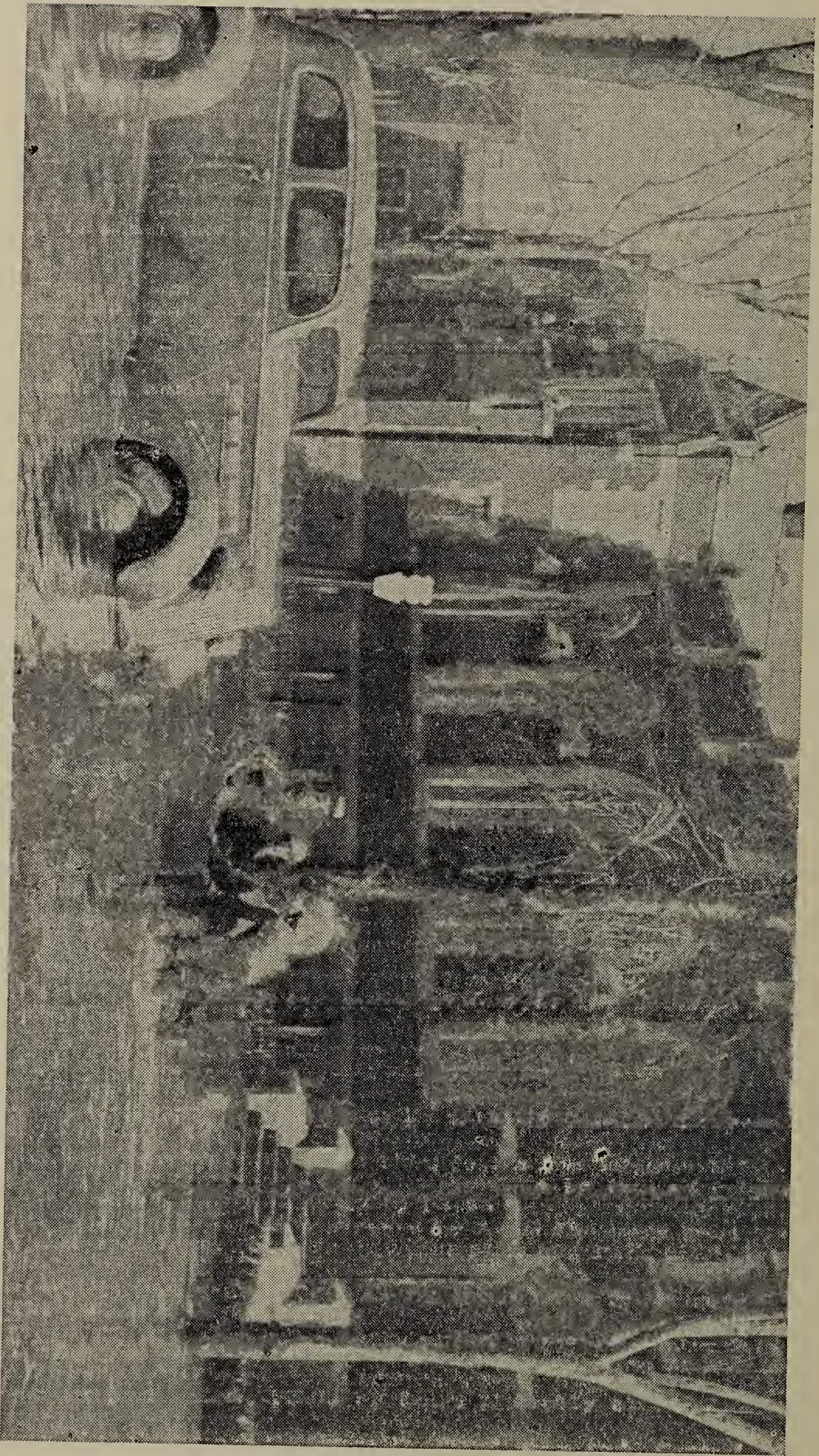
**"... She Smiles, My Lady Smiles"**



(6) Photo by Bill Rodgers



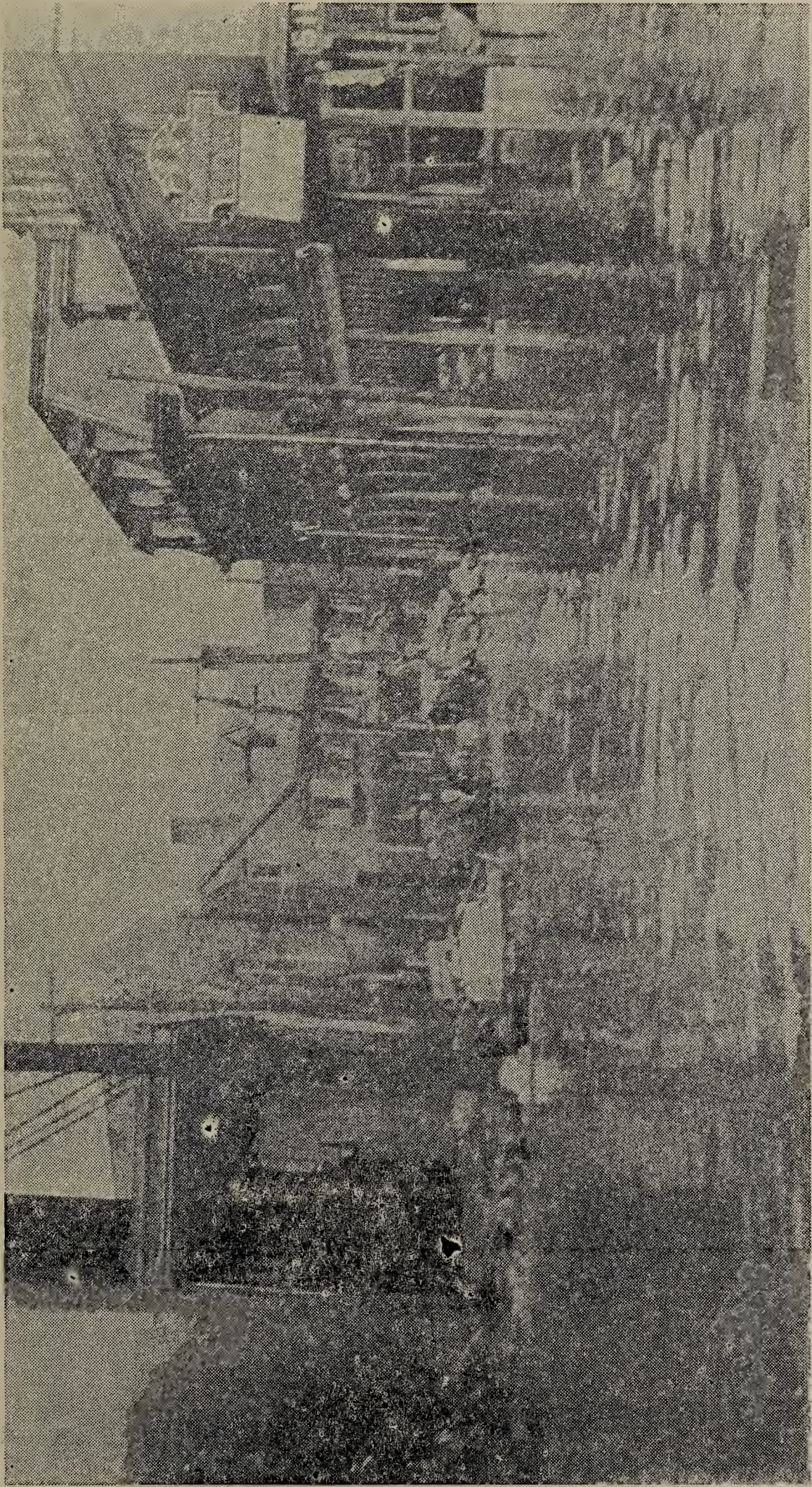
“ . . . This Is One Time We Don't Want A Limousine ”



(7) Photo by Bill Rodgers



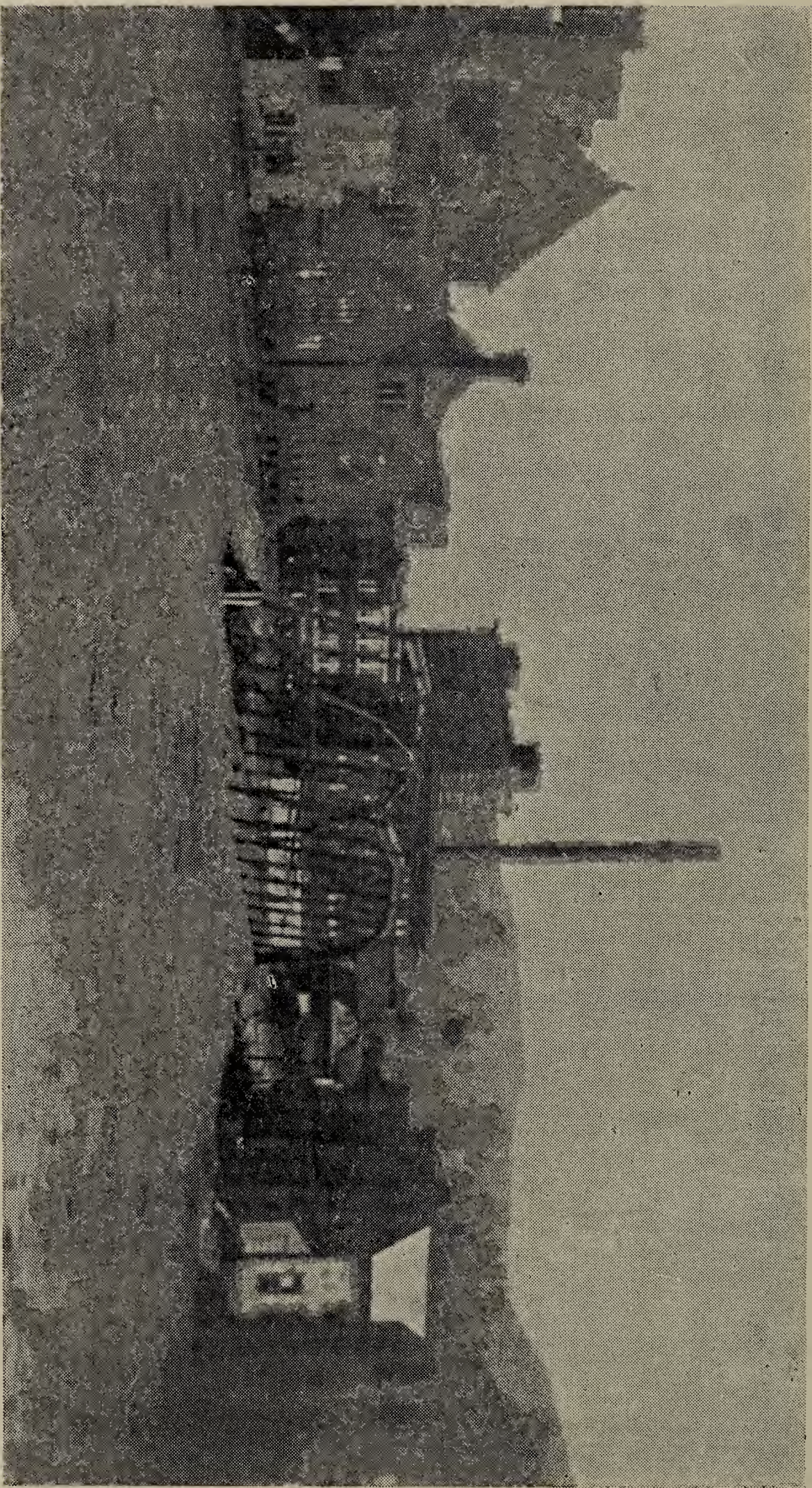
“... Around That Bend There Was A Bridge... And Will Be Again”



(8) Photo by Bill Rodgers



**“Decades of Service in Steel Ended In One Miserable Day and Night”**



(9) Photo by Miss Henrietta Uhl, Somerset



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alarming steadiness.

By early afternoon, the dash for home and safety began as the two Johnstown rivers, which circumvent the city in a natural cusp, surged over their banks and crept toward the heart of the downtown area.

In three hours the water on downtown streets rose as many feet. Trucks dashed madly about taking stranded people to their homes and to higher land and buildings. Automobiles were drowned out and were left in haste as occupants waded to hotels and stronger structures.

Meanwhile, smaller towns up the river were engulfed in torrents that caused drowning and unestimated damage.

What daylight remained began to fade and death began to strike.

Persons marooned in the Fort Stanwix hotel and other Main street buildings saw a body swirling between poles and debris bobbing about on the mad, muddy surface.

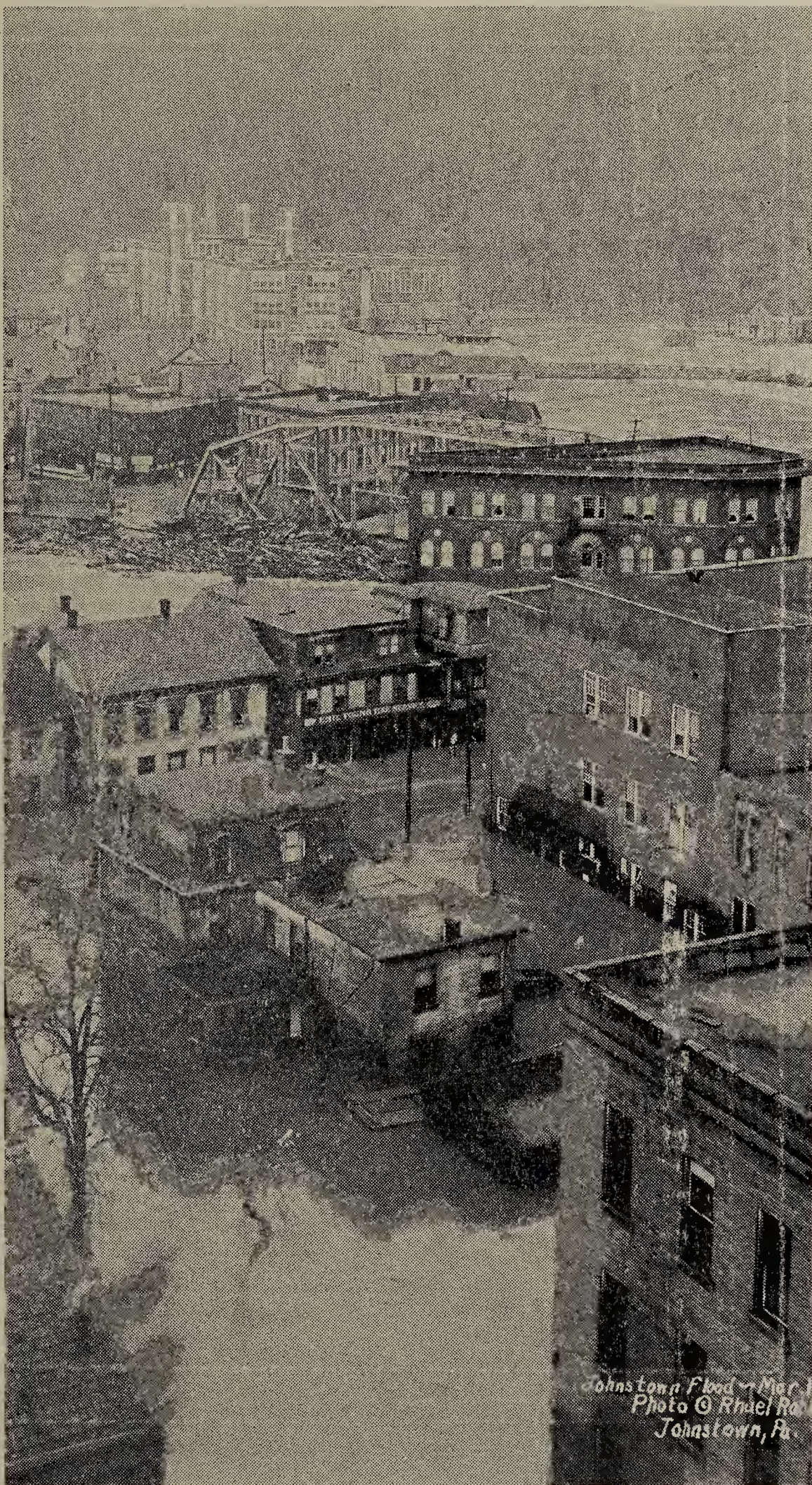
Presently, as it grew darker, screams were heard heard from a terrified woman trapped on the first floor of her home. After a while the hysterical, frightened shouting was heard no more.

Trolley cars were locked with 2,000 automobiles on the city streets, helpless because of loss of power and motivation. A street car motor man scrambled for safety on a pole after being driven from his car, his arms outstretched for assistance

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## “ . . . And The Bridge Fell.”



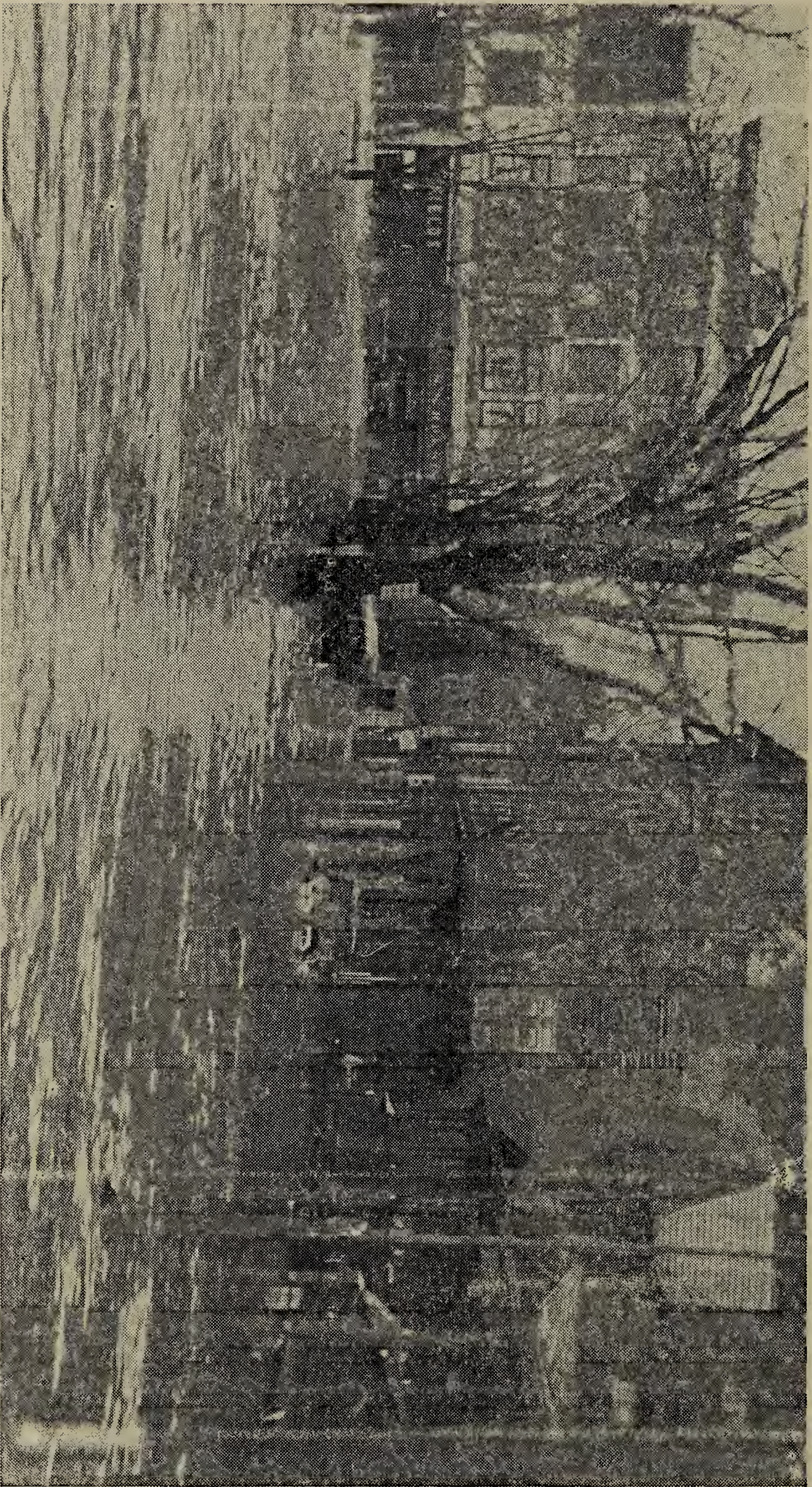
Johnstown Flood - Mar. 1  
Photo © Ruel R. R.  
Johnstown, Pa.

(10) Photo by Rogers' Studio  
Johnstown Trust Bld



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## Central Park Bids Fair To Stage A Water Carnival



(11) Photo by Louis McGready of The Johnstown Tribune

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“ . . . Kernville, Itself a City of Residents,  
Wholly Inundated”

which no one could give him. He was swept to his death.

Several people in another trolley were hauled to safety when marooned flood victims in a bank building anchored a fire hose and hauled them to safety.

Power had long ago failed. The last telephone connection out of Johnstown—a private wire owned by the Associated Gas and Electric Corporation—failed at 7 o'clock in the evening. From then until dawn, through a hellish night, the city was isolated—as completely and thoroughly as though modern communications did not exist.

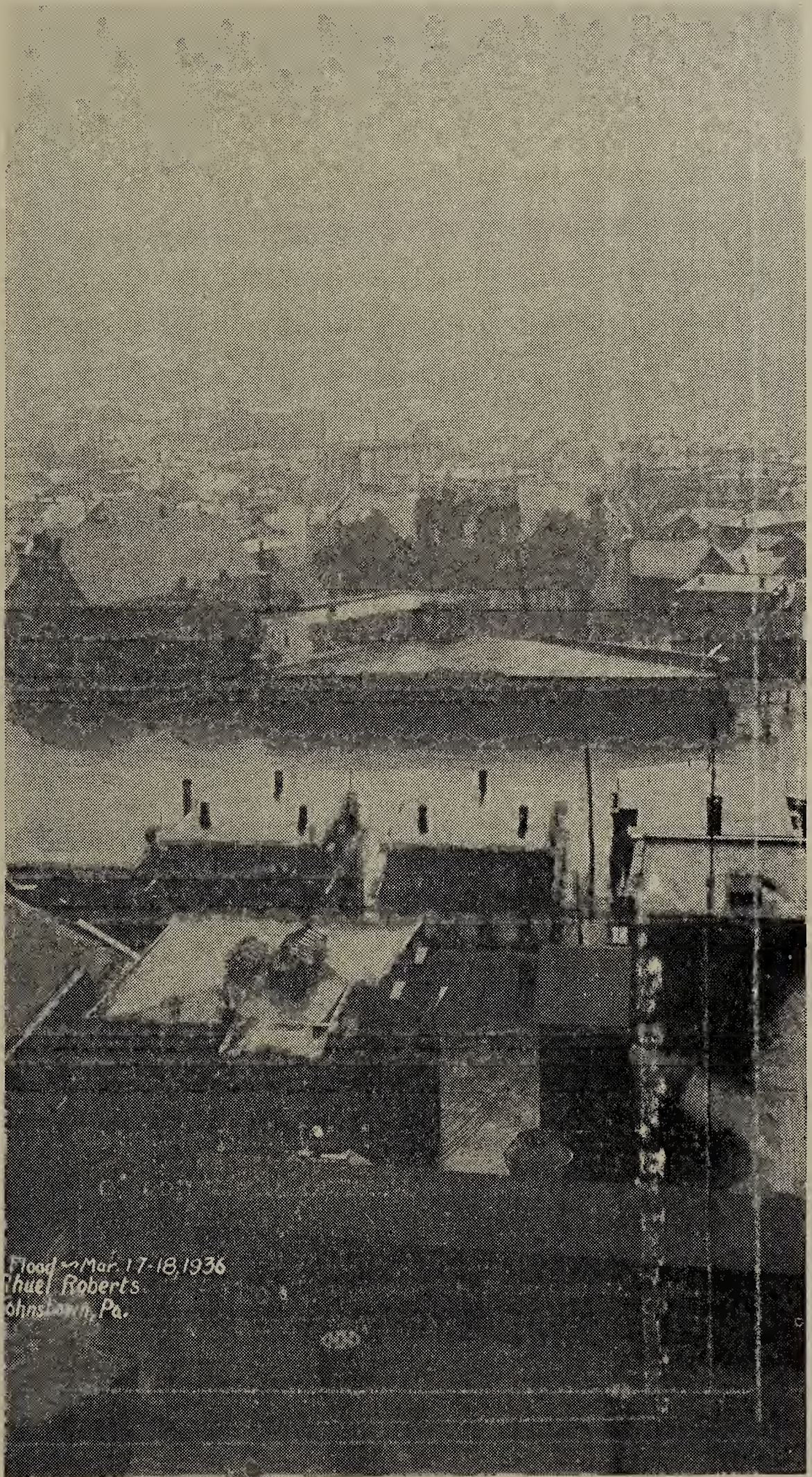
And still the water climbed.

Without heat, power or light, refugees crowded into darkened places of apparent safety to wait for developments that no one could guess and no one felt capable of anticipating.

At 8 o'clock there was more than 12 feet of water in the streets. The city was submerged over dozens of square acres, with the entire metropolitan district inundated.

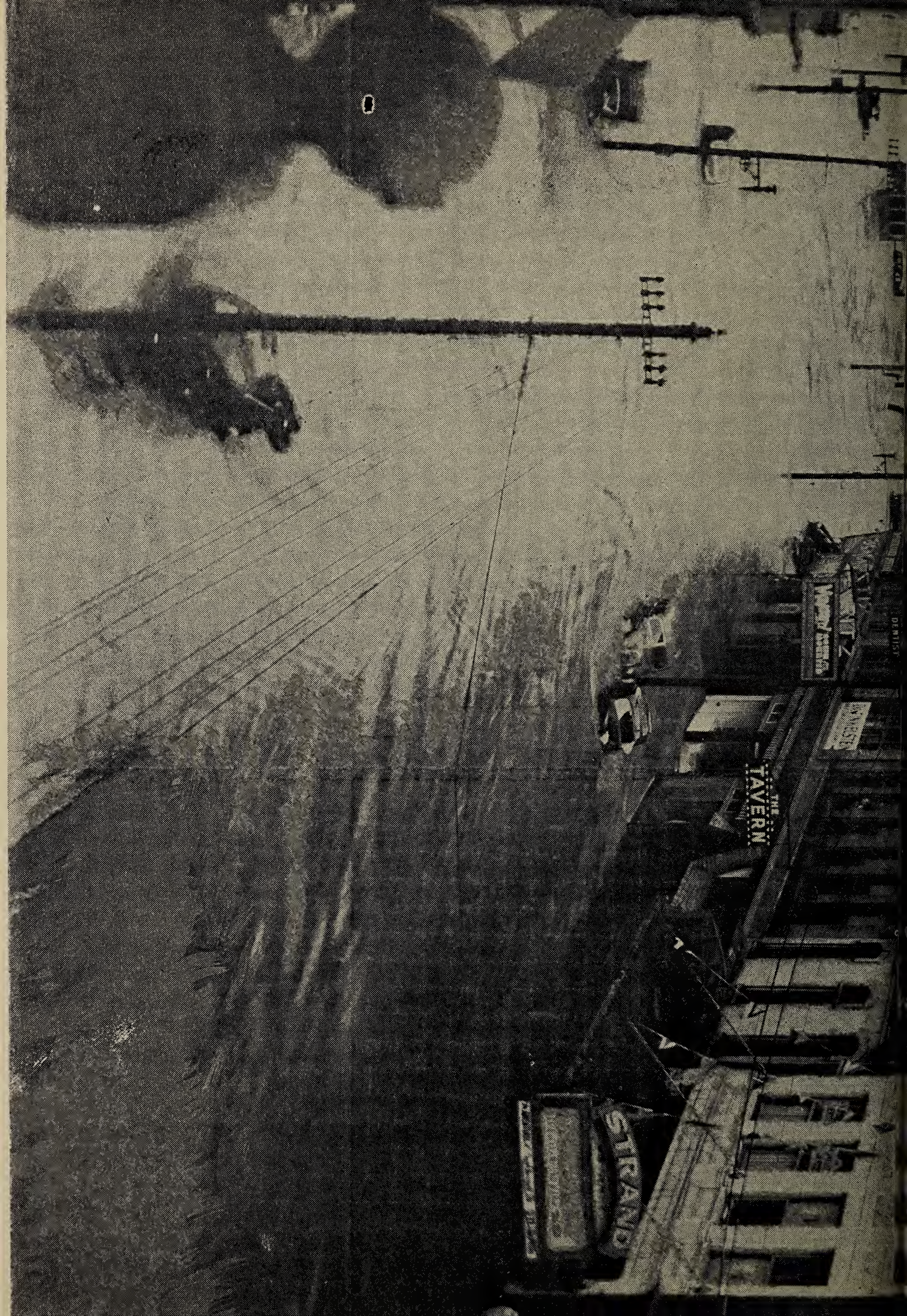
From the Mercy hospital on upper Franklin street straight in town to the hills against Prospect, Westmont and Cover Hill; from Park avenue in Moxham down the slopes to one Osborne street cliff at the hill along the B & O railroad tracks below 8th ward; from a point below Oak street down across the river to the steeps of Valley pike. It was all submerged.

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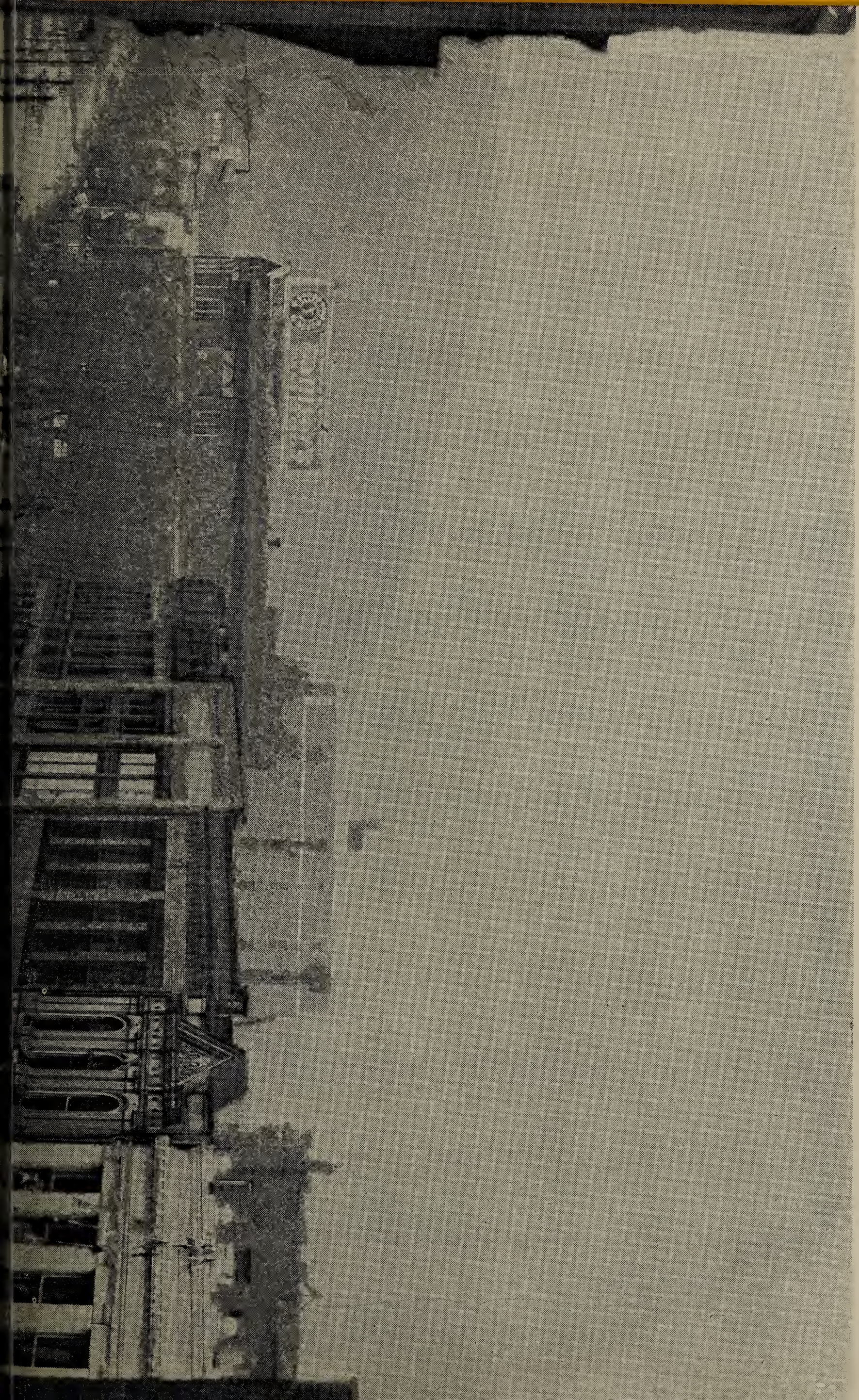
(12) Photo by Rogers' Studio,  
Johnstown Trust Building.





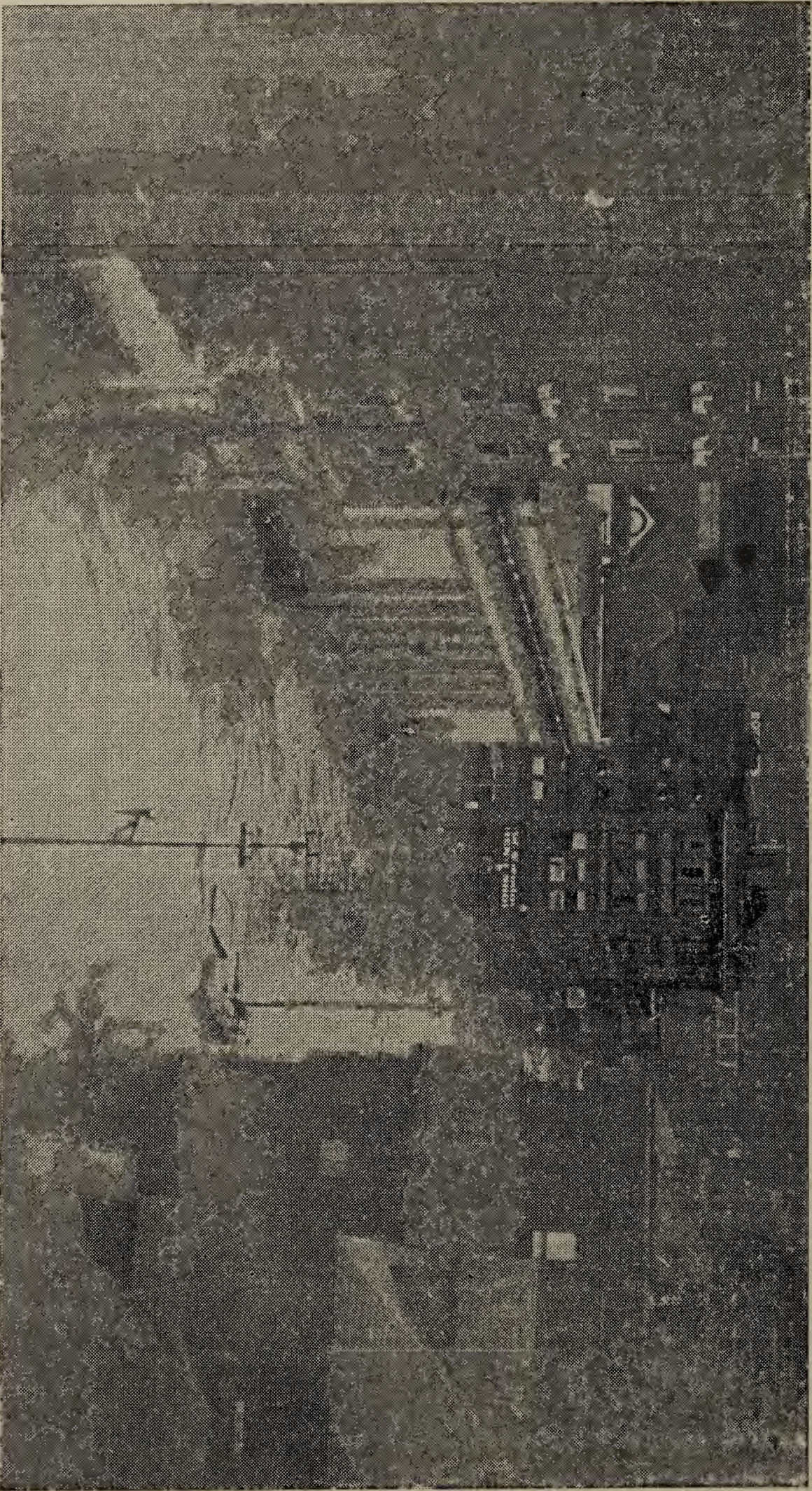


“... By The Dawn's Early Light.”





**“A Post Office Under Water Explains That Mud In Your Mail.”**



(13) Photo by Louis McCready  
of The Johnstown Tribune



## "St. Patrick's Day Twilight: A Boating Pool In Central Park."

At Penn Traffic, Glossers, Penn Furniture Co., five and ten cent store, smaller shops, and everywhere, courageous employes and business men carried merchandise and stock to second and third floors—carried and lifted until rising waters prohibited further venturing into dangerous, debris-ridden places.

In some buildings and homes there were candles; in department stores there was food; in other places there was nothing but darkness, fright and terror.

It was 9 p. m. and the waters still rose.

Resignation set in as persons in nearly 10,000 homes and buildings hoped that each ascension of the water would be the crest. Bridges were going out and insecure buildings were floating in the rivers and streets. Echoes of songs, laughter, hysterics and uncontrolled screams resounded from building to building and back again.

Grand pianos, radios, refrigerators, several bodies, automobiles, tanks, splintered wooden buildings and telephone poles swept in and out of alleys and streets as the water neared its crest of 14 to 15 feet.

A billboard, showing robins and gaudy flowers, tossed and dipped in the torrent. Letters to this effect were visible:

"Spring Opening in Johnstown, March 18, 19, etc." New merchandise, imported for the pre-Easter event, followed the sign in mockery.

One or two boats appeared and each splash of the

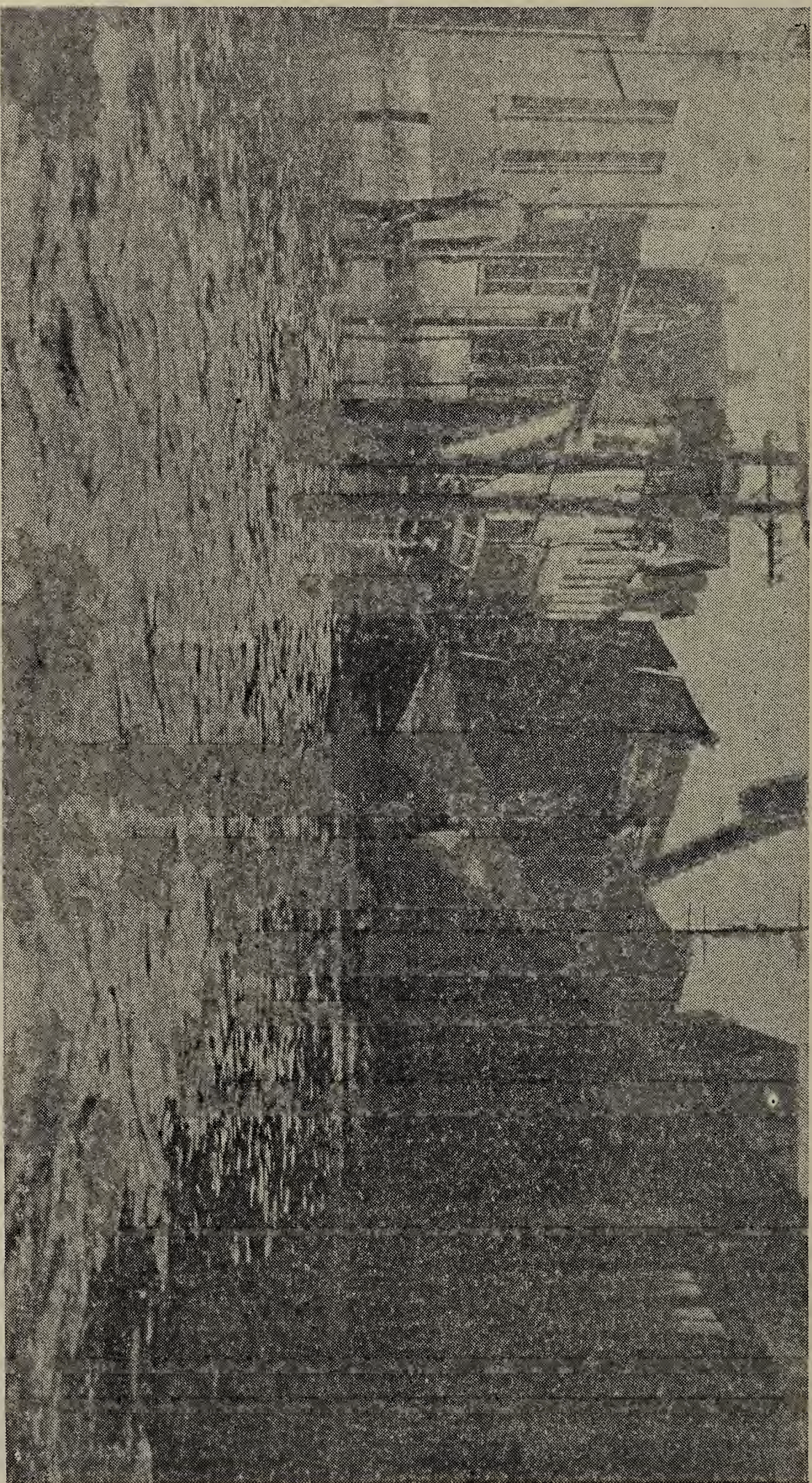
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(14) Photo by Rogers' Studio  
Johnstown Trust Bldg.



“ . . . Desolation On Willow Street The Day After.”



(15) Photo by Bill Rodgers

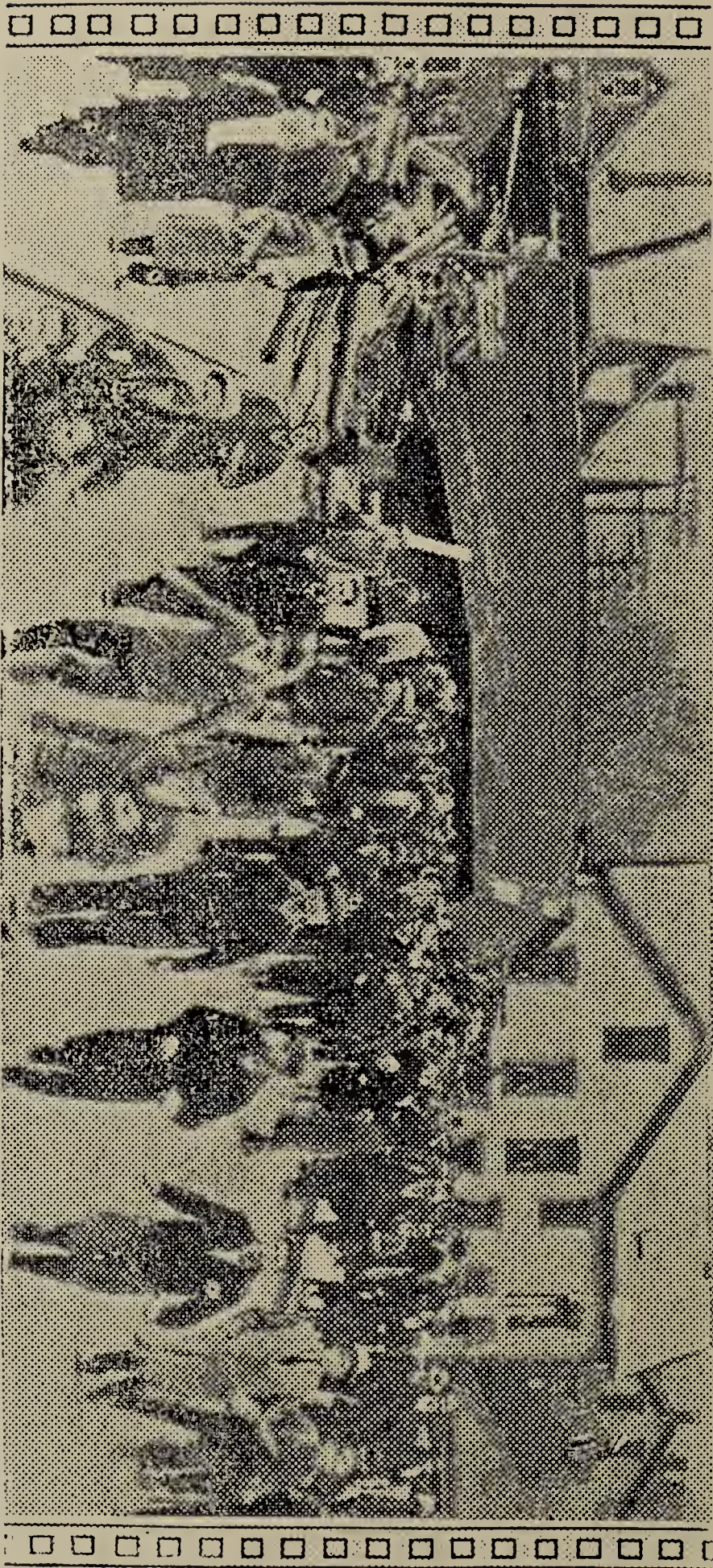


“... The Mighty Quemahoning Has Burst.”



(16) Distributed by Central Press  
and loaned for this publication  
by the Somerset Daily Herald





(17) Distributed by Central Press and loaned for this publication by the Somerset Daily Herald

## “ . . . To The Hills! The Dam Has Broken!”

oars sent a ripple of hope into those who waited for rescue. At midnight, or shortly thereafter, the water reached its height.

On the edge of the town, news men and photographers tried frantically to get into the city. Trucks were hired, but either returned to higher land or were drowned out. One persistent amateur radio station stayed at work, although reports that the operator could give were nothing more than personal observation from a limited point.

Hopes for rescue by boats were momentary for all but a few and most people who were marooned resigned themselves to waiting it out, confident by this time that the buildings in which they were stranded, having withstood rising waters until the crest, would not crumble as waters receded. Only fire, which seemed remote, was frightening.

The hectic, horrible night somehow ended as a slate-gray light pierced the sky in the east.

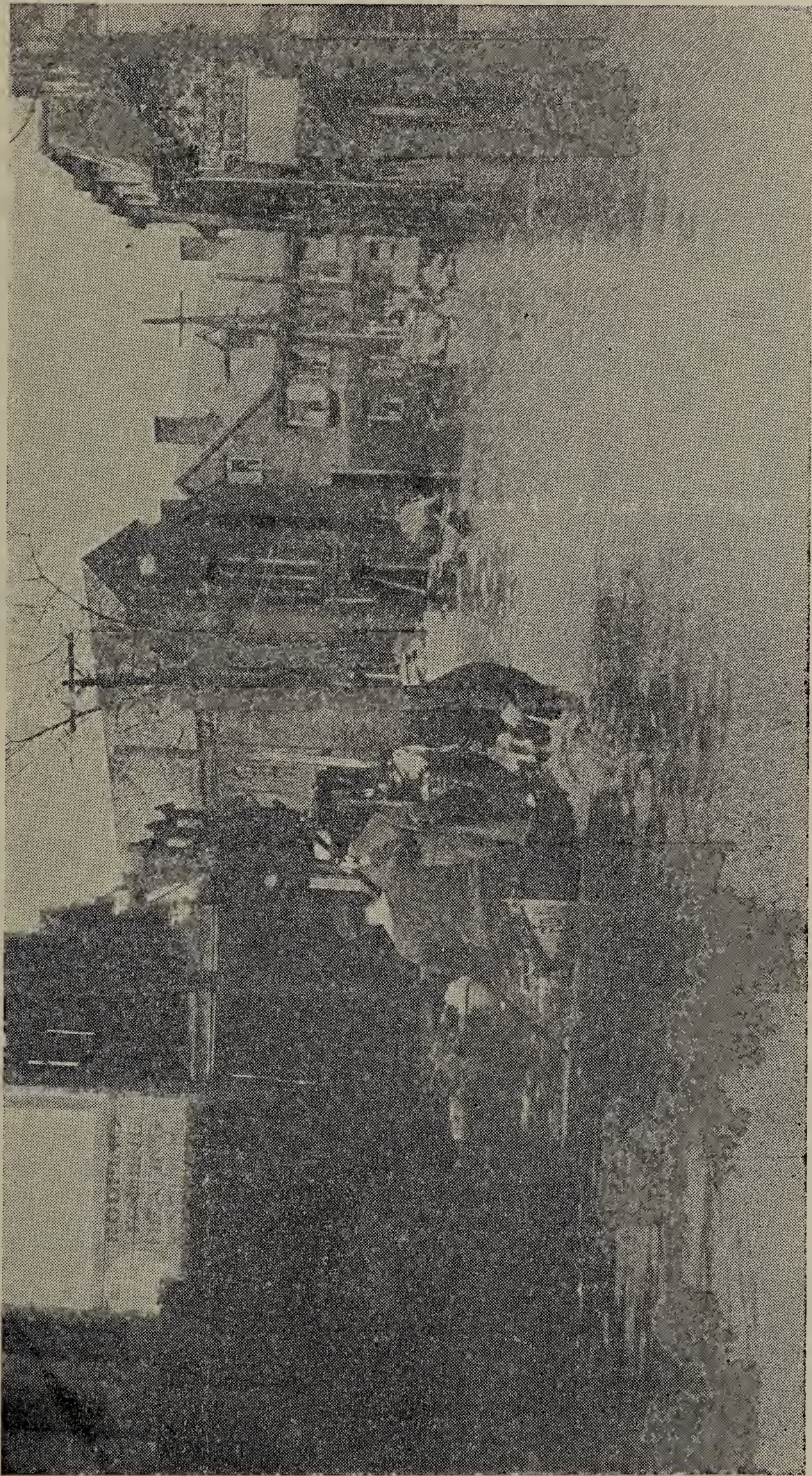
Dawn showed that waters had receded almost to the point where they had been when darkness shut out sight the preceding night. Then, at 8 a. m., with a film of fog filtering over the city, the sunshine broke through and it seemed that the city was in the

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A City Of Canals For A Day: Boatmen At Work On Franklin Street near Willow  
Street



(18) Photo by Bill Rodgers



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## WPA Men At Work Near Union Park



(19) Courtesy of WPA—Photo by Bill Rodgers

## National Guardsmen Break Ranks



(20) Loaned by Area 11, WPA—Photo by Bill Rodgers

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midst of creation with vapor everywhere.

Rescue work began in earnest. More boats appeared, and when water descended to the four and five-foot level, trucks from sections unreachable by the flood, began the grim task of hauling hundreds to the hills. By noon, travel no foot was possible, but hazardous because of silt and mud.

The frantic search for friends and families began, as each hope was adulterated with the thought of possible death. To Westmont, Southmont, Upper Moxam, Hornerstown, Ferndale, Dale and Morellville; Brownstown, Franklin, Conemaugh and other safe areas flocked thousands of refugees where they were taken in by sympathetic residents who watched helplessly from vantage points.

Airplanes zoomed overhead, movie cameras flashed and newspapermen began darting about. The mayor, and what civil authority was on hand, stepped in . . .

### "THE FALSE ALARM"

Until late afternoon—  
Then a scare!

In a panic, more horrible than the flood itself, more shocking than the terror of possible injury—people scrambled, ran, slipped, fell, stumbled toward the hills as the uni-

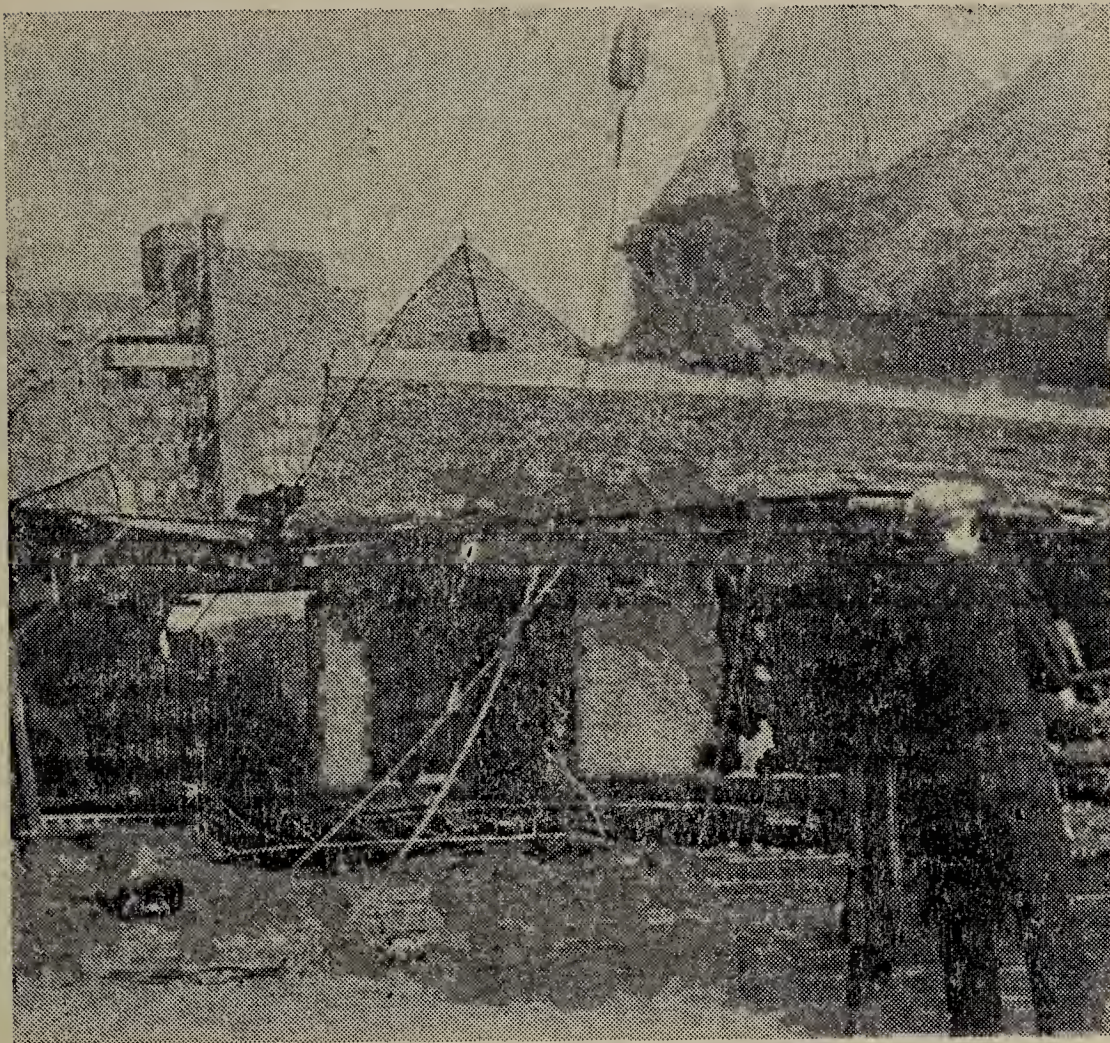
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**“A House Was Found In Our Back Yard”**



(22) Photo by Bill Rodgers

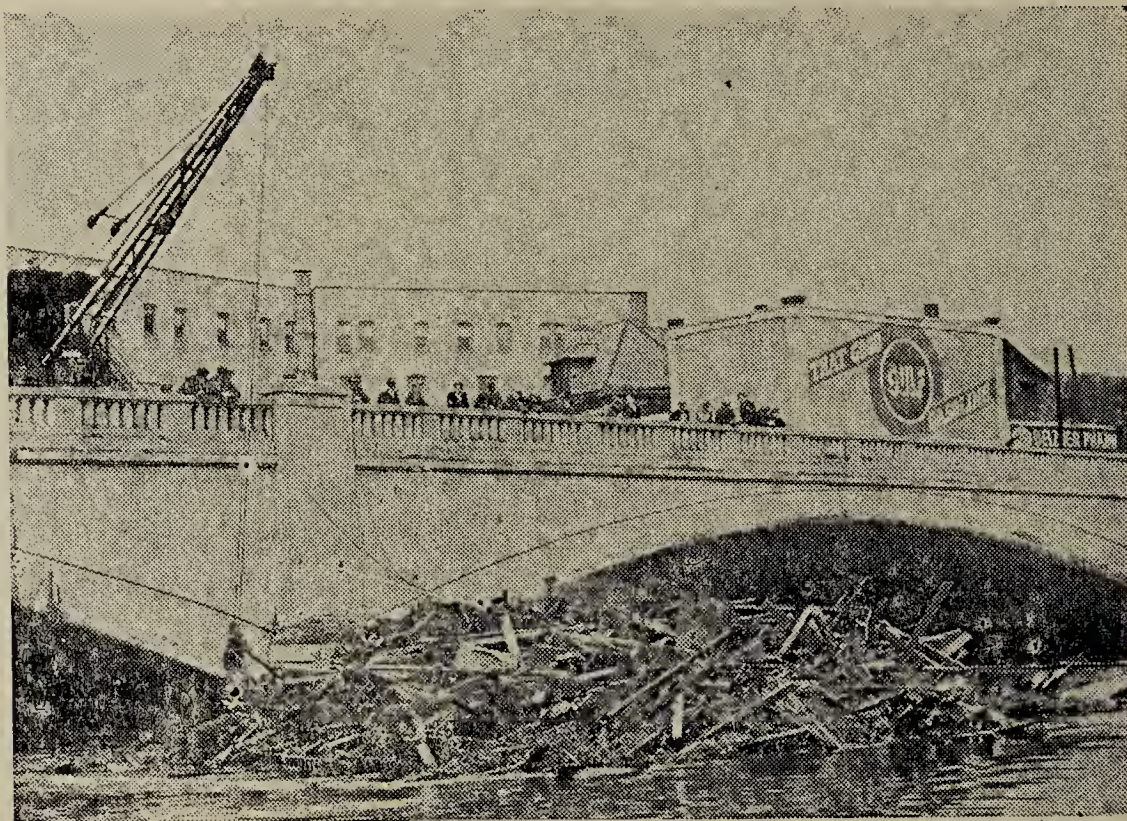
**Napoleon Street - - A Temporary Rubbish Heap**



(21) Photo by Miss Henrietta Uhl, Somerset



## Searching Among Debris For Bodies At The Imperiled Haynes Street Span



(24) Courtesy WPA—Photo by Bill Rodgers

## WPA Men Take Time Out For Lunch



(23) Courtesy WPA—Photo by Bill Rodgers

versal cry went up:

"The mighty Quemahoning has burst!"

Several deaths were attributed to this false report. It had begun to rain again as thousands made a mad dash, on sheer nerve alone, to higher land. Homes, money, materials—everything tangible—were forgotten.

Somehow the report spread. Some said it came from an airplane pilot who saw water spilling over the reservoir, which some feared might break under the pressure. The dam, really, never reached flood stage. Others said a radio operator was responsible. But the source, at the moment, wasn't important. Apparently authentic, the dam had broken.

It was hours before the rumor was proven false. Hundreds were soaked in the cold, drizzling rain as they waited for the rushing wall of water to wipe out the city. Extra papers, all over the country said the city was annihilated. Radio stations over the nation took up the cry:

"History repeats. Johnstown wiped out."

Twilight, dusk and finally night came, with very little organization yet under way. Night passed with shop owners standing in mud and water guarding their business places with shotguns to prevent looting, which was reduced to a minimum although

(Continued)



## Demise of A Family Automobile



(25) Photo by Miss Henrietta Uhl, Somerset

not entirely absent.

That was Wednesday.

At daybreak Thursday troops arrived. So did the Red Cross, the highway patrol, WPA Workers Governor George H. Earle, Robert E. Bondy, national Red Cross Disaster chairman and others. Out of town newspapers arrived. The sun was in the sky. The placid Conemaugh and the deceptive Stonycreek were well within their banks, slithering under shattered bridges and beside broken river walls.

"Johnstown must be rebuilt," said the mayor.

But there was life—a synonym of hope—and faith.

### THE RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD

Desolate, forlorn and miserable, the city awoke to find itself in the throes of military law on the morning of Thursday, March 19.

Mysteriously and without red tape or official request a vast army of Works Progress Administration project laborers and engineers arrived in Johnstown in a caravan of trucks from Somerset and northern Cambria counties with a car load of picks and shovels.

Although the task appeared hopeless, rehabilitation was launched at the crack of dawn. Working long days of ten, twelve and fourteen hours, they hauled away dirt and debris.

Despite criticism projected against the men and the

WPA organization, they did the tremendous job conscientiously and well. It was a crisis and they met the test, as did the entire organization, from Washington, through Harrisburg and the district office at Somerset, down the line to the most humble laborer.

Officials from the state capital arrived to supervise the work.

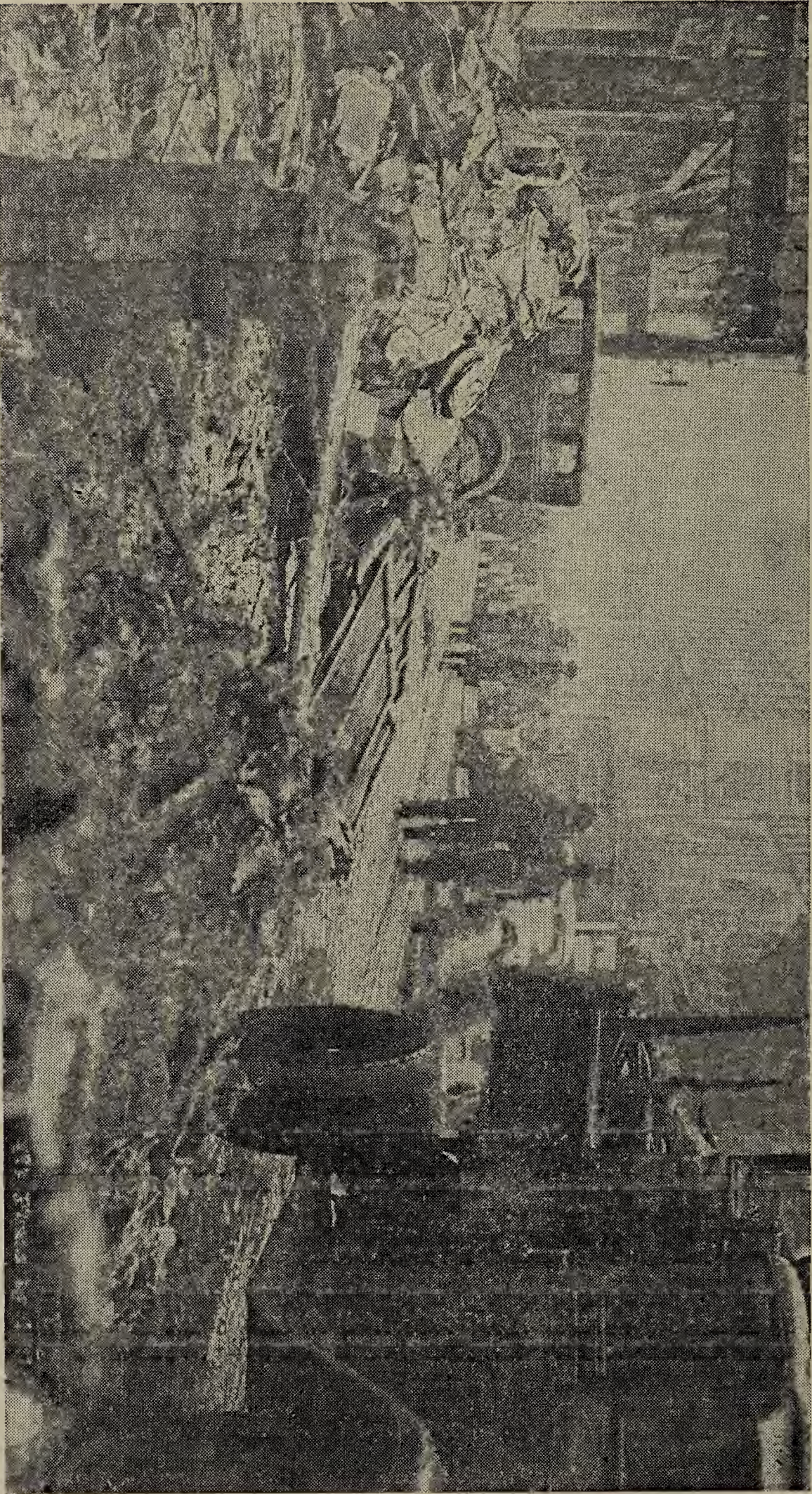
One hundred state highway patrolmen came, bringing their own food. For days these young uniformed men slept on the stages of school auditoriums and churches. Not permitted to eat food earmarked for relief purposes, they provided their own.

They did work at times that would be shunned by men of their authority. One patrolman assisted nurses in three maternity

(Continued)



“ . . . What Has Become of Johnstown's Main Street? ” - - The Gay White Way  
After the Water Had Gone.



(26) Photo by Bill Rodgers: Loaned by Works Progress Administration



## Brig.-Gen. Edward Martin and Staff



(27) Photo by Louis McCready

cases at an improvised hospital. He was nick-named "Starkie," to which he must answer his co-workers the rest of his life. In commissaries some of them even helped with the cooking and the care of cots and bedding. All this was done in addition to their regular traffic duty, which sometimes amounted to sixteen consecutive hours at a time.

But above all, of course, was the Red Cross, with its corps of highly trained, expertly skilled disaster relief workers supplementing the army of local nurses and WPA women workers.

Robert E. Bondy, national Disaster Relief committee chairman of the Red Cross, whose job was later taken over by Albert Evans, a member of the committee, fitted into their places superbly.

Dozens of nurses volunteered their services, and were put to work augmenting a staff of office workers who set up a recording system which, although simple, was designed

to prevent defrauding commissary supplies.

Fifteen patients were taken out of Lee hospital and removed to the Westmont Grove Dance pavilion. Where conditions warranted, they were taken to one of the other two hospitals.

Through the National Guard and CCC men, about 1,000 cots and blankets were obtained, and that night at the Westmont Grove pavilion, every cot was occupied by some homeless refugee.

Food began to arrive in the city by trucks, trains and planes. More than 60 truck loads of food came out of Somerset county alone, as towns like Scottdale, Uniontown, New Castle, Erie—bound in by flood waters themselves—contributed freely, without being asked.

At Krings Station, Kelso, Riverside, Ferndale, Poplar Street, Franklin street and the western part of the city, bridges went out, sky-rocketing the damage on this instance alone to more than a million dol-

lars.

One week after the flood the Red Cross commissaries were feeding 60,000 daily—a tremendous job requiring full time work on the part of several hundred persons.

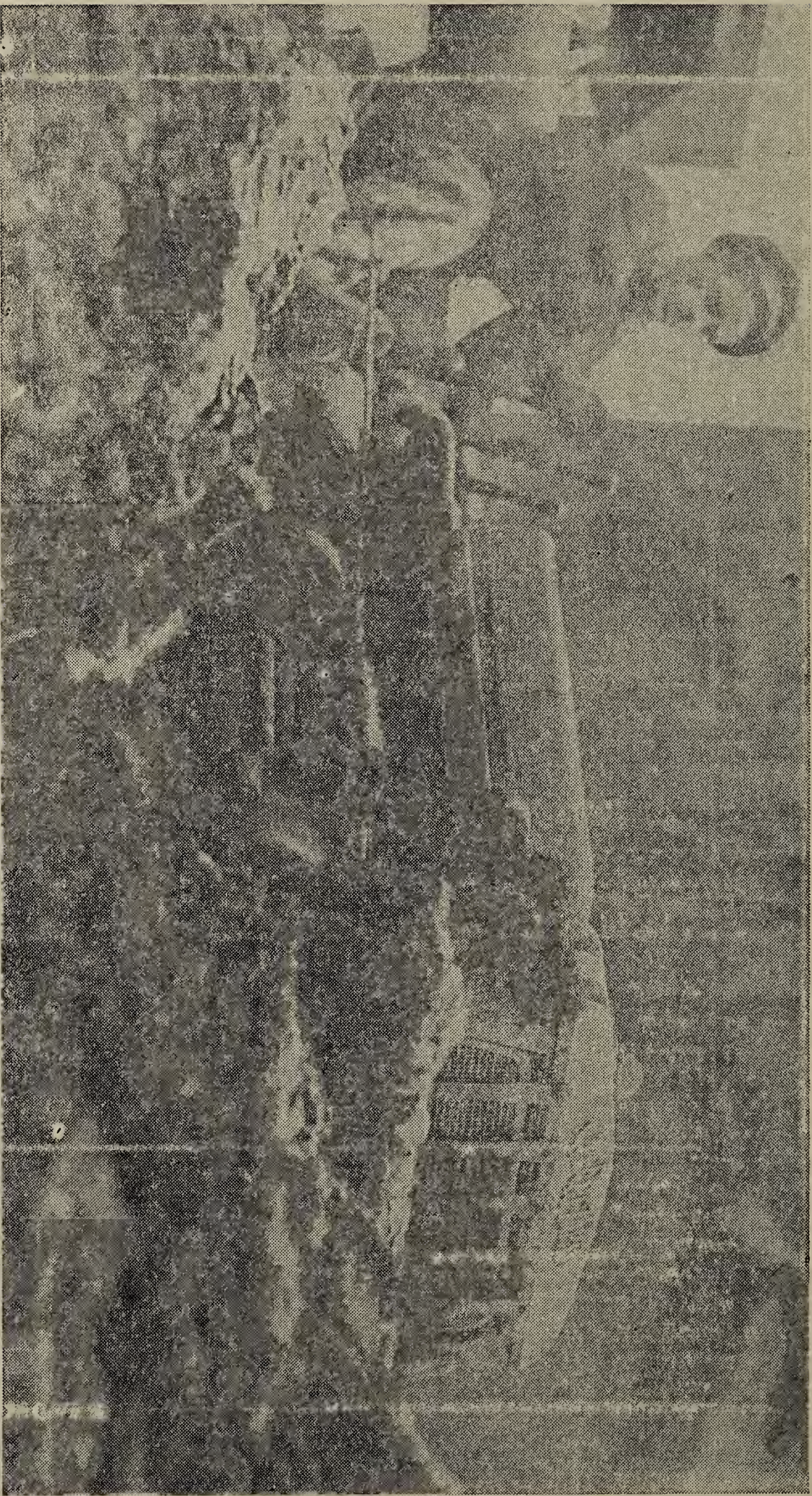
With materials supplied by the government, women who worked on WPA projects began a huge sewing job. Sitting at machines in the Nathan building, the women made clothes for refugees. Weeks after the flood, they were still at work.

With the city looking almost like a deserted town as far as inhabitants were concerned, hundreds of trucks spent days hauling thousands of tons of debris from the streets. It was dumped into the rivers from whence it had come.

Valuable pipe organs, costly sacramental equipment, bibles, books rugs and buildings constituted unestimated damages to city churches. Laborers dug into the houses of worship, salvaged what  
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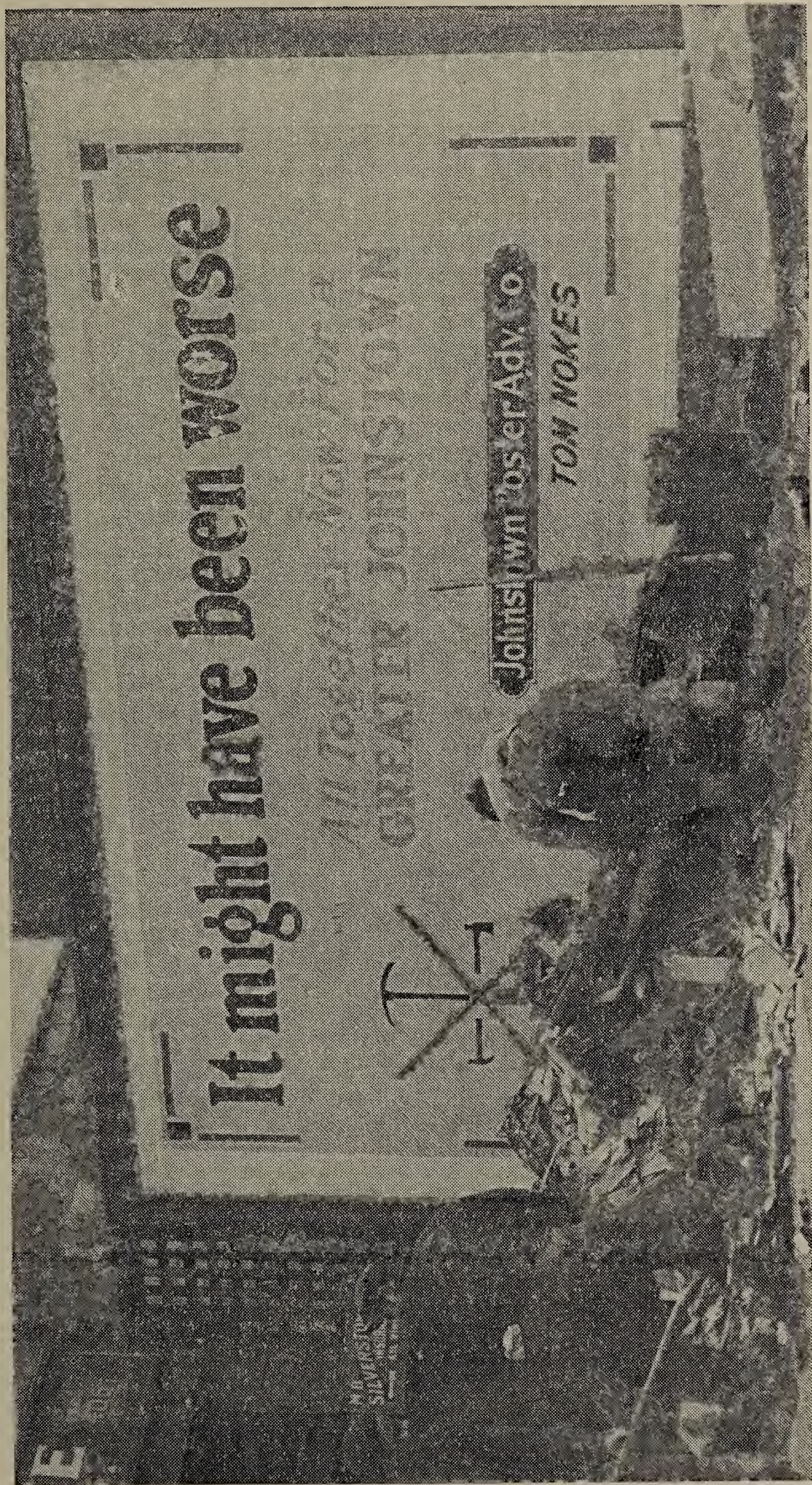
“... Tractor Plows Work Out As Well In Mud As They Do In Snow.” A WPA Man  
Operates The Tractor At Union Park.



(28) Photo by Bill Rodgers; Labeled by WPA



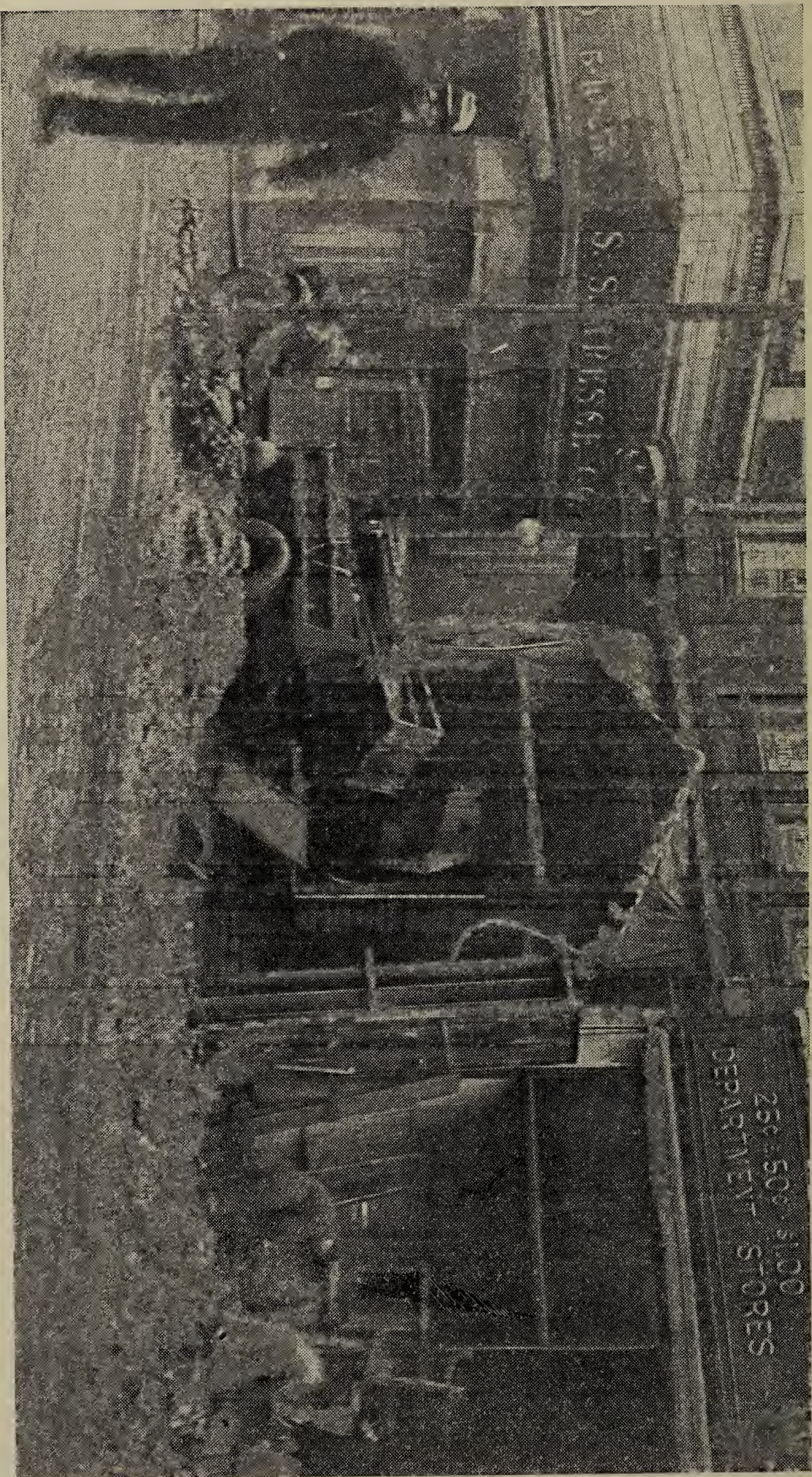
“Saddest Words Of Tongue Or Pen, Are Not These ‘It Might Have Been.’”



(29) Photo by Bill Rodgers: Courtesy Works Progress Administration



**Muck and Dirt Fill Main Street at Park Place Intersection.**



(30) Photo by Bill Rodgers: Courtesy of WPA



they could, and started rebuilding.

As the reconstruction work progressed, stories of thrilling rescues and heroic deeds began to filter out into a city wild for authentic information concerning the ordeal through which they had passed.

Newspaper plants — the Johnstown Democrat and Johnstown Tribune—which enjoyed a record for consecutive publication for decades, were washed out and could not print. Several days after the water receded, however, newspaper publishers gathered together their forces and published a restricted newspaper in the nearby town of Windber. Until that time, inhabitants depended on out of town newspapers from Altoona, Somerset and Pittsburgh to carry stories of the flood.

On March 25, a check-up revealed that 500 WPA nurses had supplemented the large force of Red Cross and relief medical women in caring and assisting stricken refugees.

The most quickly established hospital was at Westmont Grove, where 600 persons were fed and furnished sleeping quarters the day after the flood.

With Dr. H. T. Kahl, Dr. Donald Matthews and other volunteer physicians directing, the halt and the sick were cared for and fed. Many families found missing members by walking along row after row of drab cots.

In the open air dance-pavilion, cold even when shutters were closed, the only heat available came from oil stoves and one coal burner. Once the scene of gay festivities, hospital dances and roller skating events, the place became a haven for the ill and

hungry.

Westmont, which literally threw open its arms to flood stricken Johnstown, also provided another hospital and refugee center at its magnificent Westmont-Upper Yoder High school where state highway patrolmen ultimately were quartered.

In the basement, a complete grocery warehouse had been set up, serving as a vortex for supplies over a wide area.

Medical supplies were systematically arranged so that they could be distributed among 20 other medical dispensaries throughout the city. One telephone quickly set into operation, was busy continually.

Medicinal whiskey, some new and some salvaged, was stored to be used as stimulants for those who became ill from shock and exhaustion. Patrolmen stood guard over the valuable and limited supply.

Double decker bunks, cots and many beds filled the place. More than 50 nurses were quartered in the school and a radio broadcasting station, brought into play by a hastily-organized Bureau of Missing Persons, operated hour after hour.

The National Youth Administration, part of the WPA program, launched the missing persons' bureau under the direction of Red Cross executives. The number of missing persons was cut down from 70 to 30 after two days of operation.

Headquarters for federal and state public health officials were set up in Westmont with a dozen experts directing the work. A mobile laboratory was set up to analyze water and food.

Looting and stealing, which, in the first John-

stown Flood, was responsible for the loss of thousands of dollars worth of jewels and property, was held to a minimum by military forces, under the command of Brig. Gen. Edward Martin, his staff, and a corps of men that at one time nearly reached 2,000.

C. Blaine Smathers, one of the men in charge of Guardsmen, said that if the troops had not been there, "there would have undoubtedly been considerable looting."

Firemen from as far away as Indiana and Charleroi came in trucks to aid in the restoration work, bringing portable lighting equipment and pumping machines. Hundreds of homes were cleaned by firemen, who set up pumps and drained them of water.

The danger of raised prices, which always prevails where food shortages exist, was removed when wholesalers, under the direction of E. F. McGinley, passed and stuck to a resolution to keep food prices at the pre-flood level. Little, if any, major profiteering was reported.

A half dozen dairies, although hit badly by the flood, were permitted to operate within a short time, after being examined by health representatives. With the aid of milk producers from Somerset and nearby counties, milk was kept flowing into the city without interruption.

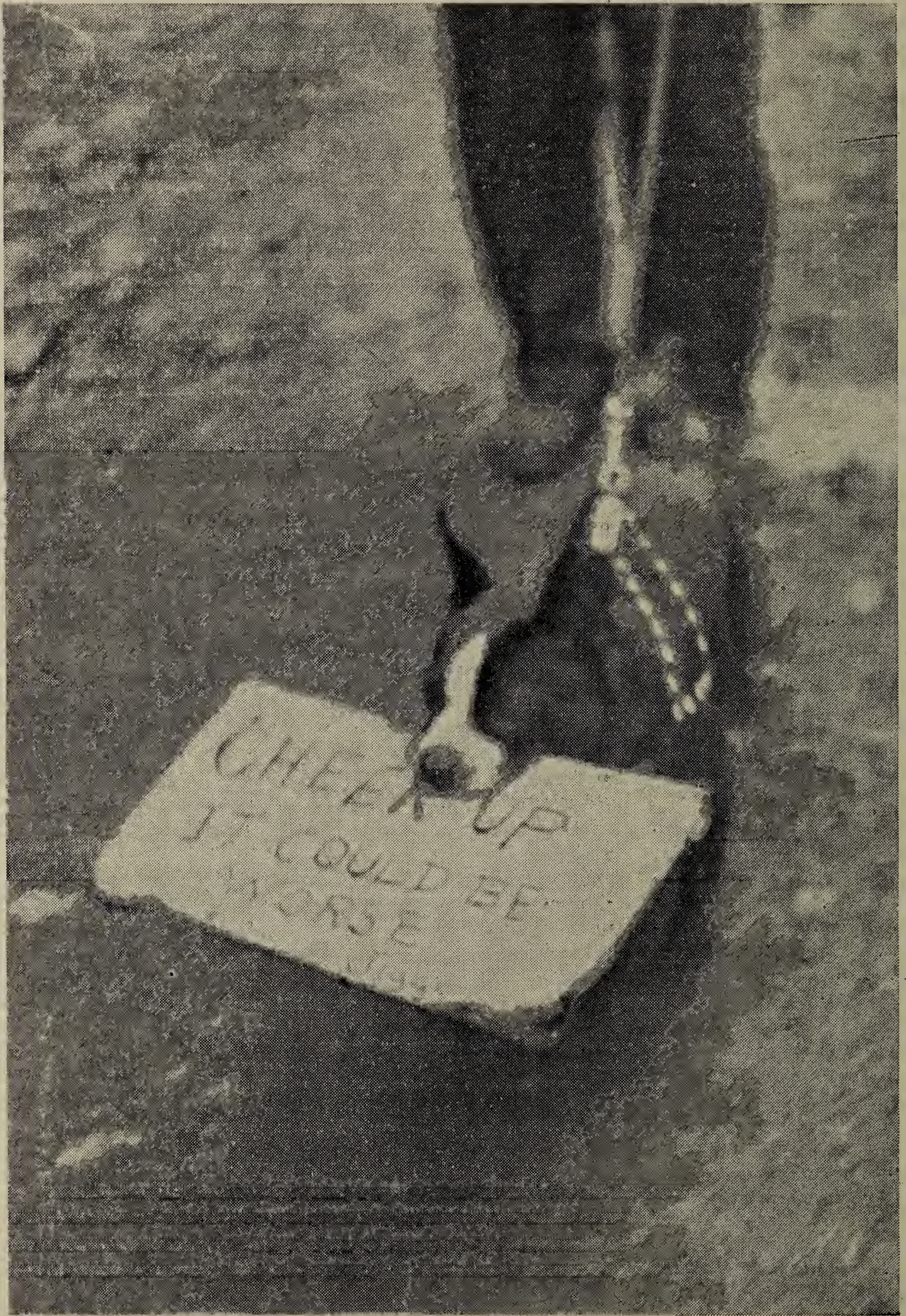
Coal also was donated—hundreds of tons of it—and dumped on street corners, where refugees came with buckets to gather it and heat houses, still sodden from flood waters.

One of the first groups to get in action in the down-

(Continued)



“... Wisdom In A Dumb, But Philosophic Animal.”



(31) Photo by Frank Jordan, of The Johnstown Democrat



town was the American Legion, which turned over its headquarters in the heart of the inundated area to flood relief. A half dozen cooks worked day and night feeding volunteer firemen, volunteer crews and refugees. Fifty waitresses worked in shifts.

American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts came through by sending dozens of truckloads of food and supplies. Some posts sent cash. Women's organizations, affiliated with the legion, went to work with the men in alleviating flood suffering.

Industry, completely paralyzed for a time, first resumed a week after the St. Patrick Day waters subsided. Mill machinery, cold and wet, was cleaned as soon as men could reach the mills, so that just a few days elapsed before heartening fires lit up the deadened city at nights. Black clouds of smoke, cursed by residents who must live under them, were harbingers of business revival.

As appeals for aid in rehabilitation work swept the nation, government photographers arrived, took hundreds of still pictures and reels of motion pictures, for Congressional Library records. The pictures were to be used to obtain financial aid for the city.

The Chamber of Commerce got its members together and started to reorganize disrupted business houses with the result that in less than a week, there were "Flood sales" and "Open For Business" signs appearing in shattered windows, still filled with debris.

The fear of pestilence and contagion which pre-

vailed for a while was reduced to a minimum, and the amount of disease was almost negligible.

With the exception of colds, throat ailments and some pneumonia that developed, there was no contagion reported. Measles, mumps and chickenpox, regarded as "children's diseases," were increased, but not to an alarming extent.

The Cambria County Medical Society got its doctors together and assigned them to designated areas. This move, done quickly and effectively, was credited with holding down the menace of disease.

Severely hindering the reconstruction work were tens of thousands of sightseers, who traversed debris-filled streets in countless numbers of automobiles. Frenzied patrolmen and traffic policemen were at their wits end trying to keep autos moving at a steady flow.

Credentials and passes, issued by the mayor and other authorized officials kept the number down for a day or two, but somehow the number of passes increased. Four or five days after the flood, practically everyone had a pass to penetrate separate areas.

With the Red Cross prepared to be on hand for three or four months, and government and private aid promised impoverished families and business firms, the city greeted the first warm days of spring.

Everywhere in the valley there was a determination to build a more desirable, more beautiful and a safer city as the populace, with picks, shovel and cleaning equipment met the need.

The panic of false reports and terrible days; the

fear of disease and pestilence—all began to seem remote. There was only one watch word . . . one plan:

On with the reconstruction!

#### ABOLISH ARCH BRIDGES AND CHANGE THE COURSE OF STONY-CREEK RIVER — (headline)

(A front-page editorial reprinted from The Johnstown Tribune of Monday, March 23, as an example of the foresight and courage Johnstown showed in the early days of rehabilitation, while the city remained in shambles, partially submerged in a sea of silt.)

\* \* \*

To what extent did the concrete bridges with their arched spans, and the stone arch bridge of the Pennsylvania Railroad retard the flow of flood waters and raise the level of the waters in the business center of Johnstown?

That question has been heard many times since Tuesday.

We are not able to answer it with any degree of exactness, but unquestionably they were responsible for the earlier stages of the overflow and have frequently in the past been solely responsible for the minor overflows which caused so much damage in the business center.

It is our opinion that the Federal Government, through its Public Works Administration, could do no better job than to replace every arched bridge in Johnstown with single-span structures affording head room for extraordinary water stages, in addition to replacing the iron

(Continued)



bridges washed out by Tuesday's flood.

The cost would be comparatively low considering the benefits that would accrue to the community.

And why not go further?

Older residents of the city will recall that Alexander Kennedy, immediately following the Great Flood of 1889, in which more than 2,200 persons lost their lives, suggested that the course of the Stonycreek River be changed. Mr. Kennedy proposed that a new channel be dug, skirting the hillside from a point opposite the Lorain Steel Company's plant to the foot of the Millcreek road at the rear of the Central High School Building.

The suggestion was not acted upon and was greeted with derision by many of the townspeople of that day, but in the light of

last week's flood it assumes the aspect of unusual foresight and sanity.

The Public Work's Administration of the Federal Government could easily finance this project along with the bridges, and it should be done now. The value of the ground reclaimed from the present sinuous course of the Stonycreek would equal, if not surpass, the cost of the improvement, added to which would be the practical assurance that Johnstown would never again be visited by such a disaster as befell the city last Tuesday night.

Responsible public officials and community agencies should lose no time in laying the project before Public Works Administrator Harold Ickes at Washington.

## INCIDENT

There were dozens of pathetic incidents reported during and subsequent to the disastrous flood, all of which were worth re-telling. One, however, printed in a Johnstown newspaper, seemed to embrace the element of pathos more than the others. It was, in effect, this:

In a ditch, near a railroad track, lay the body of a dog, caught in the swirling flood water.

Beside the body, another dog sat, still and quiet, watching and waiting.

How long the animal watched the body, no one knew. Its mate, perhaps, or a friend (if dogs have friends) of some canine escapade.

The sad, dumb creature just rested beside the figure stilled in death.

And watched . . . and waited.

# Official List of Drowned

FLOOD OF MARCH 17, 1936, JOHNSTOWN, PA.

(Prepared by Coroner Cyrus W. Davis and Deputy Coroner Everett E. Custer).

1. DANIEL GALLAGHER, aged 36, 509 Pine Street.
2. FOSTER W. BUCHANAN, aged 55, 243 School Place.
3. MRS. JACOB FRUHLINGER, aged 36, 340 Union Street.
4. JAMES LANGHAM, aged 10, 203 Vine Street.
5. JOSEPH RUNKO, aged 50, 159 Jones Alley.
6. GREGORY KOSTOFF, aged 62, 115 Front Street.
7. MRS. CECELIA SEIFERT WEHN, aged 49, drowned at the Inclined Plane, body recovered at Seward.
8. Someone unidentified and body not yet recovered, was seen by a number of people to fall into the Conemaugh River in the 11th Ward.

## COUNTY OUTSIDE OF JOHNSTOWN

1. HENRY BELANDE, aged 18, Beaverdale.
2. FABER ECKENROD, aged 44, Allegheny Township.
3. LOUIS F. ANSMAN, aged 44, Allegheny Township.
4. ANDREW GIBSON, aged 66, Bakerton.

# Estimated Damage

FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS















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